



A CELEBRATION OF

OUTSTANDING ADULT STUDENTS



**THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2025
MEMORIAL UNION GREAT HALL**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Outstanding Adult Student Celebration and Reception

Welcome

Martin Rouse, associate dean and director, Adult Career and Special Student Services

Opening remarks

Beth Warner, deputy university registrar, Office of the Registrar

Recognition of Badger Ready graduates and transfer students

The Badger Ready program is a degree pathway for those facing barriers to transfer admission at UW–Madison.

Autumn Sanchez, Badger Ready Program manager, Adult Career and Special Student Services

Sarah Stilp, assistant dean, Adult Career and Special Student Services

Transfer students (successfully completed Badger Ready requirements)

Jared Araiza	Donovan Brendler	Amber Dahlberg
Rhonda Kometer	Shane Patton	Parker Wall

Graduates

Norman Canestorp	Alex Forseth	Joseph Giron
Edward Herzberg	Marek Higley	Keerun Ismail
Todd Johnson	Kristy Jorgensen	Stefanie Kluge
Dustin McKindsey	Josh Miller	Avenash Pernankil
Amie Swanson	Stacy Tran	

Presentation of Scholarships

Martin Rouse, associate dean and director, Adult Career and Special Student Services

Anne Niendorf, scholarship coordinator, Adult Career and Special Student Services

The following scholarships are funded by the listed organization and private donors to the Adult Student Scholarship Fund. Recipients will be invited to the stage in alphabetical order.

Alma Baron Second Chance for Women Scholarship

Elissa Kinch

Jessica
Kingsborough

Evie Quarm

American Association of University Women-Monona/ Madison Branch Scholarship

Amanda Sauri

Heather Stoll

Barzilai Foundation Scholarship

Kirsten Armour

Rachel Bayer

Valerie Carrimon

Francesca
Nimityongskul

Joe Corry and Barbara Weston Corry Scholarship

Anna Longeran

Amanda Sauri

Crankstart Reentry Scholarship

Bobby Adamo

Kari Arnett

Barbara Bahr

Kyle Beckman

Willy Holden

Jordan Hynum

Jessica
Kingsborough

Tasha Miller

Deshira Morina

Keagan Williams-
Salgado

Stuart Daily Seeds of Learning Scholarship

Elissa Kinch

Bekah Wilce

Nancy W. Denney Memorial Scholarship

Heather Stoll

Kindness Matters Scholarship

Anna Longeran

Bernice D. Kuney Scholarship

Bao Vang

Amber Williams

Lisa Munro Two-Generation Scholarship

Ashley Lee

PLATO (Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization) Scholarship

Lucy Xiong

Division of Continuing Studies Returning Adult Scholarship

Tanesha Jones

Doug Kieler

Marie Kim

Linda Orié

Yolanda Pushetonequa

Kaycee Rogers

Felipe Rosas Gomez

Kokouvi Sedjro

Linda Serna

Lars Shimabukuro

Erin Underwood

Rachel Walker

Bekah Wilce

Amber Williams

Lucy Xiong

Britt Marie Zeidler

Single Parent Undergraduate Scholarship

Amanda Sauri

University League Scholarship

Barbara Bahr

Cynthia McCreary Holbrook Youmans University League Scholarship

Linda Serna

Bernard Osher Reentry Scholarship

Kyle Beckman

Max Edmonds

Nolan Frank

Willy Holden

Jordan Hynum

Tasha Miller

Bianca Navari

Dawn Ring

Alex Smith

Heather Stoll



Outstanding Undergraduate Returning Adult Student Awards

These awards were established in 1981 by the Dean of Students Office (now called the Office of Student Assistance and Support) to honor returning adults who have arrived at senior status while juggling all the commitments of adult life. These are students whose unusual determination and perseverance have enabled them to pursue academic goals and contribute to the community by demonstrated leadership and service.

Presentation of Adult Student Awards

Mari Magler, director, McBurney Disability Resource Center

Sarah Stilp, assistant dean, Adult Career and Special Student Services

Finalists

Madeline Bilbrey

Molecula Hopkins-Sheets

Amber Kirkpatrick

Daniel Schuyler

Winners

Ivanna Ceballos

Chikara Crooks



Student Stories

Bobby Adamo is a father, husband, brother, son, and friend who has worked for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits for 30 years. He is a proud Chicagoan and member of Local 3 Liquor Workers Union. As the years passed, Bobby became increasingly bothered by his lack of a college degree. In 2011, he earned an associate degree from College of DuPage with a 4.0 GPA. Bobby's interest in UW-Madison was sparked in 2023. After a year of ponderance and planning, he applied in the summer of 2024 and was accepted into the Wisconsin School of Business. He plans to graduate in 2027 with a bachelor's degree in business administration: management. In his free time, Bobby is a basketball and lacrosse referee.

Born in Tucson, Arizona **Jared Araiza** has lived in Wisconsin his whole life. When he was four years old he wanted to be a volcanologist, but when he was older he was uncertain of his career path. His initial experience at Madison Area Technical College did not go well and he ended up on academic probation. After discussing this with his parents, he considered his options, and with some soul

searching he found what he was truly interested in. While the pandemic slowed his progress, he was able to finish an associate degree and get off of academic probation. He took time off to work before applying for transfer to UW-Madison. He was disappointed to receive a denial letter and blamed himself for not trying harder. Then he learned about the Badger Ready program which gives students another chance. He was admitted, completed the program, and is now a transfer student majoring in anthropology with a certificate in art history. His goal is pursue a career working in a museum after graduation. Jared thanks Badger Ready and his parents for their support and guidance. The promise he made to his late grandmother, will be fulfilled when he graduates.

Kirsten Armour is a sole parent who completed a degree in criminal justice from the University of Northwestern, St. Paul in 2013. She went on to provide legal and shelter services to domestic violence victims in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. When her daughter was born, they relocated back to Wisconsin for Kirsten to pursue work in county

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

government. She worked as an economic support supervisor for over a year, creating connections and gaining knowledge. In 2019 she began work at the county's Aging and Disability Resource Center. For nearly six years she has worked to advocate, educate, and advance disability services, and she also brought over \$1,500,000 in federal funds to local residents by means of benefit approval. Kirsten is actively applying this same energy to a master's degree in social work.

Kari Arnett is a dedicated student at UW–Madison, pursuing a bachelor's degree in health promotion and health equity with a certificate in disability rights and services. Passionate about advocacy and accessibility, she currently works at the McBurney Disability Resource Center as a peer notetaking coordinator, where she ensures students with disabilities receive the support they need to succeed. Kari began her educational journey at Madison Area Technical College where she worked in the Student Success Center assisting students access counseling and advising services. Her lived experiences navigating financial hardship have shaped her commitment to improving access

to mental health services. Kari plans to pursue a master's degree in counseling psychology with the goal of becoming a licensed mental health therapist.

Barbara Bahr is a first-generation student who graduated from Madison Area Technical College last May. She is pursuing a bachelor's degree in elementary education at UW–Madison. Barbara got married at the age of 18 and helped her ex-husband build a successful photography business in California while raising three kids. Since the divorce she has struggled with bankruptcy, home insecurity, and food insecurity. After meeting her partner, who encouraged her to pursue her ambitions, she has been following her dream to become a teacher. She is passionate about education, especially for young women, and plans to use her education to inspire her students.

Rachel Bayer is a dedicated medical student committed to serving underserved communities and advancing healthcare equity. As the oldest of eight siblings, she grew up in a single-parent household and faced significant financial challenges, instilling resilience and a passion for helping others. She

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

earned a bachelor's degree with a major in biological sciences, followed by valuable research experience at the Mayo Clinic and Harvard Medical School, focusing on fatty liver disease and cancer immunology. Currently pursuing a doctorate in medicine, Rachel is excelling academically while actively engaging in community service through programs like MEDiC. Her goal is to integrate research and clinical practice to improve patient outcomes and address disparities in healthcare access worldwide.

Kyle Beckman planned to transfer to UW–Madison over 10 years ago, but due to severe depression he had to drop out of his final semester. The ensuing several years were challenging for him and his family, as his condition wasn't responding well to treatment. In time, with the support of his family, friends, and healthcare team, he felt ready to return to school. He came out of that experience realizing that helping others is the only goal worthwhile to him. Kyle started at UW–Madison in spring 2025 to pursue a bachelor's in health education. He is adamant about continuing his volunteer work at local community centers and is excited to learn and grow through his time at UW–Madison.



When **Madeline Bilbrey** made the decision to return to school to pursue an undergraduate degree, she never imagined the incredible support and encouragement she would receive from individuals like her advisor. Before returning to school at the age of 26, she worked for a female-owned and operated landscaping construction company in Chicago. She loved the work but knew she had larger goals for her future. She recognized that in order to grow and achieve her personal and professional aspirations, she needed to take this leap. Initially, returning to school was daunting and starting over felt overwhelming. She knew she had more to accomplish; even if it meant stepping outside of her comfort

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

zone. She found like-minded individuals through Sigma Alpha where she's had the opportunity to participate in clothing drives to support underprivileged community members. Additionally, she was fortunate to secure a position at the USDA Mura Cranberry Physiology Lab, where she has been working since May 2023. Though this chapter of her life has been formidable, she will look back on it with gratitude and admiration. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career in the environmental field, working on ecological advancements and sustainable solutions, and hopes to earn a master's degree in environmental studies.

Donovan Brendler is completing a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture as a returning adult student. Upon graduating high school in 2012 he went to UW-Milwaukee for their architecture program and quickly realized he was not ready for the rigors of college. Following years of working, travel, and a couple degrees at Madison Area Technical College he was ready to earn his bachelor's degree. He would like to thank his wonderful wife, family, friends, and Autumn Sanchez who all have been nothing but enthusiastically supportive.

In 2018, **Norman Canestorp** was laid off from his telecommunications job. Despite a 15-year break since last attending school, he decided to return to college and complete a bachelor's degree. He began at UW-Madison through the Badger Ready program, and was subsequently admitted as a transfer student. Managing a full-time job while attending classes, he still found time to volunteer through the National Student Speech-Language Hearing Association. Support from instructors, teaching assistants, and advisors has been indispensable to his efforts and achievements. Norman will be attending the graduate program for speech-language pathology at UW-Madison this fall. He continues his volunteer work at GiGi's Playhouse, a local Down Syndrome achievement center.

Valerie Carrimon is a student in the part-time master of social program and plans to continue in the counseling field as a licensed clinical social worker. Valerie has worked as a substance abuse counselor for many years at her tribe's outpatient clinic. Valerie's Ho-Chunk name is Wakajaconiwinga which means first thunder. It refers to the first time in spring when thunder is heard,

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

indicating the change of seasons. Valerie is a member of the thunder clan and proud parent to the most amazing daughter.

As a first-generation student from an immigrant family, **Ivanna Ceballos's** early academic journey was marked by financial struggles and responsibilities that extended far beyond her coursework. While her peers focused on typical college experiences, she balanced work, family obligations, and the pursuit of legal residency for her parents. These commitments ultimately forced her to leave school for several years, but she never abandoned her goal of higher education. Between 2015 and 2020, she worked full-time while attempting to continue her education at Northern Illinois University and Joliet Junior College. In 2020, after successfully sponsoring her parents' immigration status, she enrolled at Madison Area Technical College before gaining admission to UW–Madison as a transfer student. Support from the McBurney Disability Resource Center, student organizations, and the Center for Educational Opportunity (CEO) provided guidance, encouragement, and reinforced her commitment to

her goals. Her volunteer work with the Community Immigration Law Center provided hands-on experience in immigration law, deepening her passion for advocacy and social justice. Ivanna intends to pursue a career in immigration law, using her experiences to advocate for marginalized communities navigating the complexities of the legal system.

The eldest of three children growing up in a single-parent household, **Chikara Crooks** graduated from high school in 2010 and immediately joined the work force. Her initial plan was to save money to become financially stable and attend college. Becoming a mother at an early age changed her plans, although she still wanted more out of life, namely a career and to earn more than the minimum wage. When her child was old enough to attend school Chikara became an LPN, working in internal medicine and pediatrics for over eight years. She was enthusiastic about her career, but wanted to further her scope of practice. Going back to school in her late 20s, she was terrified, excited, and anxious. She started at UW–Whitewater Rock County, earning an associate degree in sciences and arts, then transferred to UW–Madison with

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

the intention of earning a degree in nursing. Learning about the health promotion and health equity major, she realized that medical social work would allow her to combine her passion for patient care with her desire to help people navigate the emotional and social aspects of healthcare. She is graduating in May and has been admitted to graduate school to pursue a master's degree in social work. She is determined to pave the way for a brighter future for her family and serve as a beacon of hope for others who face the same struggles.

Amber Dahlberg has been captivated by computers and electronics since childhood which fueled her commitment to pursuing higher education. In fall 2023, she started with the Badger Ready program quickly feeling at home on campus. Amber was admitted as a transfer student for fall 2024 and intends to pursue a biological systems engineering degree.

Max Edmonds is pursuing an undergraduate degree in psychology. After his 2014 high school graduation, he attended Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. He transferred to UW–Madison in 2015, but left

school in 2016 to address personal mental health issues. After seven long years of personal growth and development, he returned to UW–Madison in fall 2023 and has been working hard on all his classes. He has discovered that he loves learning and is looking forward to graduating in fall 2025. Max plans to pursue a master's degree in counseling psychology and serve neurodivergent young adults.

After graduating from high school in 2009, **Alex Forseth** embarked on an unconventional journey. Immediately following graduation, he spent a gap year in the United Kingdom and then went on to complete a stint in China. He eventually entered the hydraulic industry, where he worked for five years before co-founding a company, Fluidhaus LLC, which continues to operate today. The business and basic programming skills he gained rekindled his passion for learning, and after successfully completing the Badger Ready program, he was admitted as a transfer student at UW–Madison in fall 2021. After graduating in 2024 from UW–Madison with a double major in data science and economics, Alex transitioned into a career in sales at an AI startup,

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

where he leverages his data science knowledge and previous entrepreneurial experience to thrive in an exciting industry.

Nolan Frank is a fun-loving jack-of-all-trades who is currently majoring in human development and family studies, while completing prerequisites for nursing. In developing himself for service, in addition to his studies he has been invited to work in several labs (including the Educational Neuroscience Lab and the Brain and Early Experience Lab with the Center for Healthy Minds). Based on his previous experience teaching high school, he was hired as a student hourly worker in the School of Human Ecology (SoHE), where he's worked as a teaching assistant, a research assistant, and on a special curricular redesign project. This latter work, with two SoHE professors, was awarded a \$1 million corporate donation by Groupon to implement their ideas, which was paid out to SoHE generally.

Joseph Giron's education began at a bilingual elementary school, where he gained language and adaptability skills that continue to support his academic journey. At age 25, he enrolled at the

former UW-Fond du Lac campus, balancing coursework with playing soccer and working in bilingual Latino community development for UW-Extension. Motivated to continue learning, Joseph joined the Badger Ready program at UW-Madison and was later admitted as a transfer student. He became involved in a neurology research lab focused on stroke, where he continues to conduct research using MRI imaging, RNAscope/BaseScope in situ hybridization, and middle cerebral artery occlusion (MCAO) vascular surgery to investigate potential treatments. He helps train new students in the lab and advocates for diversity in science. Joseph graduated from UW-Madison with a degree in neurobiology and pursues a career in medicine to serve underrepresented communities.

Felipe Gomez is a master's student in the educational leadership and policy analysis program, focusing on policy evaluation. He currently serves as an engagement and education coordinator at the Morgridge Institute for Research, where he collaborates with diverse stakeholders to promote educational initiatives and foster community engagement. Before

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

this role, Gomez taught in inner-city Milwaukee, where he discovered his passion for education. His firsthand experience in under-resourced classrooms ignited his desire to influence educational policy and create more equitable learning environments. Gomez aims to leverage his expertise in policy evaluation to develop policies that enhance educational outcomes and address systemic inequities.



Edward Herzberg enlisted in the United States Marine Corps after high school, serving four years and two deployments in the infantry before being honorably discharged in 2015. Returning to his home state of Wisconsin, he pursued a degree in journalism at Madison Area Technical College until deciding he wished to follow a different career path and left school. After several years outside academia, Edward returned as a University Special

student at UW–Madison through the school’s Missing in Action Recovery and Identification Project, eventually moving to the Badger Ready program and transferring in as an undergraduate. An avid reader and history buff, he majored in history with plans to pursue a career as a historian. Edward graduated from UW–Madison in May 2024.

After high school, **Marek Higley** started his post-secondary education at Madison Area Technical College, hoping to eventually transfer to UW–Madison. However, addiction disorder got in the way, and his education was waylaid. Marek began working in construction, primarily as a carpenter and plumber. After a few years of working as an apprentice, he got his general contractor’s license and started his own small business doing maintenance and remodeling. During this period, after years of trial and error, he put together a long stretch of sobriety, started a family, and began ruminating about whether he was finally ready to reclaim his dream of graduating as a Badger. While pursuing his education, first through Badger Ready and subsequently as a transfer student, he worked and cared for his family, maintaining

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

a 4.0 GPA, while working on double major in geography and cartography GIS, and a certificate in environmental studies. Marek is graduating in May 2025.

Willy Holden graduated with an associate degree in nursing from Madison Area Technical College in 2014 and is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN) at UW-Madison. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, which delayed his plans to return to school, Willy has shown resilience and determination. He has balanced his studies with full-time work and the responsibilities of raising a family. Willy's experiences in supporting his son through addiction issues and saving his life with Narcan have fueled his commitment to nursing. He aspires to assist veterans facing housing issues from a nursing perspective and make a positive impact in his community.

Molecula Hopkins-Sheets has always been motivated with a passion for helping others and a desire to learn about people. At age 21, she moved to Madison with her partner and her dog, set to study psychology when COVID-19 hit, cutting short her journey to continue her education.

Two years later she was living in rural Wisconsin working on a small organic vegetable farm. During this time, she realized she wanted to learn more about the human body and mind which precipitated her return to formal education. She put in the work to maintain a 4.0 GPA at Western Technical College, kept herself financially afloat, and got admitted to UW-Madison to pursue a bachelor's degree in health promotion and health equity. She secured a job doing writing and research work with Dr. Malia Jones, helping write and revise academic papers into public-facing materials. She has one more semester after this spring. In addition to working, studying, and volunteering as a health coach at Wingra Family Medical Center, she has been researching and beginning to apply for medical schools. She could not be where she is today without perseverance, her support system, and Bucky's Tuition Promise, a program that allows her to pursue her dreams of becoming a family medicine or OBGYN doctor in rural America.

As a real estate broker, **Jordan Hynum** is familiar with the nontraditional hours it takes to become successful as an adult

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

returning to school. She first attended Madison Area Technical College in 2016 with the intent to transfer to UW–Madison. After earning 63 credits at Madison College by 2018, she decided to pause her educational goals to focus on some personal challenges in her life, including learning to manage her severe anxiety. In 2025 at the age of 26, Jordan is a proud junior at UW–Madison, working towards a bachelor’s degree in marketing so she can continue to grow and better serve her community and those around her!

For **Keerun Ismail**, education has been a profound tool for healing and growth. Growing up, childhood trauma left a lasting impact on her sense of self, making it difficult to see a clear path forward. For her, education became more than just an academic pursuit—it was a way to reclaim her strength and rewrite her story. In the Badger Ready Program, she discovered an academic opportunity and a community that recognized her strengths and supported her journey. Wanting to understand how early experiences shape individuals, families, and communities, she pursued a degree in human development and family studies. Now pursuing a

master’s degree in human ecology, she is committed to developing trauma-informed parent education programs that give families the tools to navigate adversity with strength.

Todd Johnson graduated on the dean’s list with a 3.9 GPA from the School of Education with a bachelor’s degree in fine arts. He is working with an elementary children’s group at his local community center. He’s also working a third shift job at a group home for elderly mentally ill individuals, distributing medication and managing situations that arise. He played and coached basketball on the college level for Madison Area Technical College and is now looking to continue building his coaching experience by helping young men manage athletics and academics. He hopes there’s a place for him here at UW–Madison.

Tanesha Jones is a returning student at UW–Madison pursuing a doctorate in educational leadership and policy analysis. As a teacher, she found that colleagues came to her for advice and thus discovered her passion for helping other teachers lift students to their highest abilities. Following a nine-year hiatus, taking a step

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

back to foster one child and birth two more, Tanesha is enthralled about pursuing her academic and professional goals.



Kristy Jorgensen is originally from Madison and attended classes at UW–River Falls before returning home to work at the height of the Great Recession. She married and started a family, but always wanted to return to school to finish a degree. After joining the Wisconsin Air National Guard in 2015, she went on to complete an associate degree in liberal arts at Madison Area Technical College in 2018. She took a few classes at UW–Whitewater but it wasn't a good fit. She found out about the Badger Ready and

UW–Madison Online programs at UW–Madison which fit well with her busy life and provided the flexibility needed to study while being deployed all over the world. She graduated from UW–Madison in May 2024 with a degree in consumer finance and financial planning. Shortly thereafter, she pivoted to a career in wealth management and is currently studying for her Certified Financial Planner designation.

Doug Kieler served 15 years in the U.S. Army, where he worked as a special forces medic until being medically retired due to injuries sustained over his career. Leaving behind a profession he loved was extremely difficult, and he and his wife faced the additional challenge of relocating to a new state and starting over. Now, both are pursuing higher education, his wife in psychology and Doug in medical school, while navigating the transition from military life to student life. Despite dealing with chronic pain and a traumatic brain injury, he remains committed to his family, education, and future career as a physician, where he hopes to continue serving others through compassionate and skilled medical care.

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

Marie Kim is a reentry undergraduate student currently majoring in chemistry and hopes to eventually major in material science and engineering. Ultimately she wishes to pursue graduate work in chemistry/material chemistry and also earn an MBA. Her passion for chemistry and science drives her determination to finish her education after four years of medical leave.

Elissa Kinch is studying clinical rehabilitation counseling in which she will complete a master's degree in 2027. She began her studies at Johns Hopkins University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology. She then spent six years working in research positions in the behavioral biology division of the psychiatry department and the cognitive neurology division of the neurology department at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. She hopes to help people with disabilities find employment. She is also active in the Clubhouse movement and performs accreditation visits for Clubhouse International.

In the fall, **Jessica Kingsborough** will participate in the UW–Madison Online business degree program.

Jessica left college at age 19 and started a career in real estate. Through her 25-year career she has worked in multi-family, general brokerage real estate, and she currently works for a large publicly traded real estate investment trust (REIT). In 2023, Jessica decided to return to college to pursue a bachelor's degree in business management. She started her journey back by attending Madison Area Technical College in the liberal arts transfer program. Returning to college has not been easy as a working wife and mother. However, Jessica will graduate from Madison College this spring with a 4.0 GPA. Upon completion, she will be the first in her family to graduate from college.

Right out of high school, **Amber Kirkpatrick** joined the National Guard where she met her husband. They married young and had a son, now 16, and a daughter, now 14. Once her children started school, a desire to find her own path led her to surgical technology. She earned an associate degree from Milwaukee Area Technical College graduating with honors on the dean's list. Work as a surgical technologist was fulfilling, but she was drawn to the role of nurses.

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

She applied and was accepted into the nursing program at Milwaukee Area Technical College in 2020, but was forced to decline when her husband's military career required them to relocate to Portage. When the time was right, she applied to Madison Area Technical College but was waitlisted. In the meantime, she took a job at Madison Surgery Center, where a coworker encouraged her to apply to UW–Madison. To her surprise she was accepted. Starting at UW–Madison in her late 30s while working was difficult but she found support from instructors, her manager, and peers. This support helped her push forward. The very recent loss of her brother was devastating, but Amber appreciates the support of those around her and she knows the strong foundation she built will allow her to persevere despite the grief she is feeling. This August she will begin her nurse residency in the operating room at Madison Surgery Center.

Stefanie Kluge has been fascinated with weather since she was just shy of age five. Experiencing a tornado inspired her desire to study meteorology. She attended community college but had to take a break from school when she developed serious health

issues. When she regained her health she returned to school. After a visit to UW–Madison and the Cooperative Institute for Meteorological Satellite Studies (CIMSS) she knew she wanted to major in atmospheric and oceanic sciences. She applied as a transfer student and was referred to Badger Ready. Admitted as a transfer student starting in fall 2021, Stefanie graduated in December 2024.

Being a Badger is part of **Rhonda Kometer's** family. With multiple alumni and current students in the family, Rhonda was thrilled to start at UW–Madison through the Badger Ready program. Her experience with family health issues and navigating the health care system, have been the motivation for her to pursue a major in gender and women's studies. Her goal is to help people become their own health care advocates. Rhonda was admitted as a transfer student in fall 2024.

Ashley Lee graduated from the UW Odyssey Project during the pandemic in 2020. She is pursuing an associate degree in nursing at Madison Area Technical College and hopes to become a registered nurse. Part of her interest in healthcare comes from being the

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

mother of a second-grader with autism. She writes, “Advocating for my child’s education, therapy, and overall well-being has strengthened my resilience, problem-solving skills, and ability to balance multiple responsibilities. These experiences have also deepened my passion for healthcare, particularly in providing compassionate and patient-centered care. As I pursue my nursing degree, I bring with me the empathy and perseverance that come from being both a caregiver and a dedicated mother.” Ashley plans to use the two-generation scholarship to support her education and to obtain specialized learning materials for her son, Kingston, “ensuring he has the tools to succeed.” She writes to Kingston, “You are the motivation for my heart to keep beating. I went back to school because you needed to see me do it. Everything I do is for our future.”

Anna Longeran continues her third year working toward a doctor of nursing practice (DNP), focusing on systemic causes of health disparities in marginalized populations. Recently, she worked with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to gain statewide support for multi-component behavioral

interventions to treat childhood obesity, specifically in priority populations facing challenges due to race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Driven by a passion for public health, Anna uses her skills to advocate for positive system changes in health policies. Her daughter is her biggest motivation, inspiring her to overcome challenges and grow stronger. Anna hopes to teach her daughter that hard work and resilience lead to success, and that setbacks do not define you but how you choose to respond to them does.

Dustin McKindsey graduated from UW–Madison with a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a certificate in health and the humanities. He is the first in his family to earn a degree. He balanced his studies with roles as a father, researcher, tutor, leader, and volunteer. His children, Athena and Colt, were his inspiration and strength throughout the journey. Dustin now sets his sights on a career in medicine and plans to apply to medical school in the coming year.

As a teenager, **Joshua Miller** sought help for his personal struggles through social services, but they could not provide adequate help for

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

him. Fast forward and the teenager is an adult. He gained some new titles as father, husband, Badger Ready graduate, UW–Madison graduate, and full-time graduate student. He has found success in multiple facets of life and has the extreme passion to become the best version of himself. He is pursuing a master’s degree in clinical rehabilitation counseling and plans to provide inclusive care for all communities promoting strength-based recoveries.

Tasha Miller is returning to school after taking several breaks to explore her interests, start a family, and find out that she’s autistic! She has since discovered that her true passion lies both in a laboratory and in helping others, and she dreams of getting her PhD. She wants to help children and other autistic people discover the amazing world of STEM, despite how things may have gone so far. In her spare time, she loves to ride motorcycles, garden, read, and go on adventures with her husband and their four kids.

Deshira Morina is a determined, resilient woman who is working to rebuild her life after surviving domestic violence. She is a proud mother of three and is passionate

about empowering women who have experienced similar challenges. After years of isolation and discouragement, she found the strength to pursue an education and earned an associate degree. She is now focused on continuing her studies and eventually earning an MBA. Deshira’s ultimate goal is to create a program that provides resources and financial aid to women in need, helping them regain their independence and confidence as they rebuild their lives.



After winning a ballet competition at the age of 15, **Bianca Navari** was invited to perform in the Bolshoi Ballet Academy’s Spring Gala in Moscow. The school invited her back to train with them year-round so the next year she left her family and moved to Russia. After graduation, she was invited to work at a theater in Moscow where she performed all

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

of the major classical ballets and toured throughout Russia, western Europe, and South America. She loved her job, but her intellectual curiosity started to take the wheel, and while quarantining during the pandemic she decided to apply to college. Bianca is a fourth-year undergraduate at UW–Madison, studying chemical engineering.

Francesca Nimityongskul is a graduate student in UW–Madison’s biomedical data science program. She enjoys teaching, and is planning to launch free after-school programming courses with the public schools to help parents with childcare coverage. Programming is fun, and she wants to see the art of building applied to more interests and fields, driven by children’s ideas. She enjoys spending time with her three daughters. Francesca teaches them the science behind cooking and baking, and she learns origami from them. She taught her daughters how to create simple programs that support daily tasks, such as replacing a broken spinner that determines the next moves in a game.

Nothing can stop **Linda Orie**, as she is a force of nature like the wind or a storm. The beauty she

creates is reflected in her students’ delight in learning and feeling empowered. She fights for the underdog like getting “mad-dog mean” when it seems like she’s not going to make it. Many she loved so deeply used this against her, until the rope snapped and they fell like loads of rocks into the darkness. They betrayed her, but she smiles courageously because she won! She bore two sons and a daughter, and together they rise like Phoenix toward a new beginning!

Shane Patton is thrilled to be recognized as a returning adult student and proud participant in the Badger Ready program. His educational journey began several years ago, but life responsibilities prompted him to step away from school before finishing a degree. Returning to UW–Madison has been both challenging and deeply rewarding. Through the Badger Ready program, he found a supportive community and flexible resources that have allowed him to pursue his academic goals while balancing work and family commitments. Shane has aspirations to enter a computer science or, more preferably, a data science program. He is especially grateful for the encouragement he has

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

received from faculty, advisors, and loved ones, all of whom have played a significant role in his success. Looking ahead, he hopes to use his experience as a nontraditional student to inspire others who may think it's too late to continue their education. UW–Madison's culture of curiosity and collaboration reignited his passion for learning, and he can't wait to see where this path leads.

Avenash Pernankil left a career in the service industry to pursue his true calling, social work. He is about to graduate with a master's degree in social work and would like to practice clinical social work, engaging in psychotherapy and counseling, and performing research on medication-resistant mental illness. Using his voice as one of the few Asian American men in the social work field, he hopes to contribute to destigmatizing mental health treatment among men and among Asian Americans. The Badger Ready program gave him the tools to succeed as a returning adult student and opened many doors for his future. Outside of his academic pursuits, Avenash loves to rock climb, cook, garden, and spend quality time with his partner, Michaela, and their extremely cuddly cat, Piper.

Yolanda Pushetonequa is a PhD student studying linguistics. Her focus is language revitalization and endangerment. As a member of the Meskwaki Nation (Sac and Fox Tribe of Iowa), she plans to conduct grammatical analysis of the tribal language to support the development of language teaching and learning resources, and conduct language documentation. She is a returning student parent and a teaching assistant for the language sciences department at UW–Madison.

Evie Quarm is a dedicated nursing professional currently pursuing a doctor of nursing practice (DNP) at UW–Madison. With over eight years of experience working with the geriatric population, Evie has developed a deep passion for providing compassionate care to older adults. As a cancer survivor, she is also committed to supporting individuals undergoing cancer treatment. Evie aims to become a nurse educator and a primary care advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) specializing in geriatric care. Through her work, she hopes to make a meaningful impact on the healthcare profession by mentoring future nurses and providing holistic, patient-centered care to vulnerable populations.

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

Dawn Ring is a returning adult student after seven years of being a stay-at-home mom. She has three beautiful children, Lorenzo (7), and identical twin girls Isabel and Reina (20 months). She attended UW–Madison’s School of Nursing in her early 20s but decided that nursing wasn’t her life’s calling. Shortly after deciding to take a step back from school to do soul searching on her career goals, she became pregnant and found out her true calling was becoming a mother. She hopes to return to school so she can use her nursing background and degree in human development and family studies to help guide children with their mental health needs.



Kaycee Rogers is a first-generation college student pursuing a PhD in curriculum and instruction in the School of Education. She is a dissertator studying rural multilingual teacher identity, agency, and positionality through a community-engaged research lens. Her PhD studies complement a long career as an educator and teacher educator, where she has focused on serving immigrant, refugee, and multilingual students, teachers, and families. Due to her own rural roots, Kaycee is passionate about supporting rural public schools and communities through her work. She is from rural northwestern Wisconsin but has made Madison home with her loving family. She has a supportive husband, a witty middle schooler, an independent elementary schooler, a quirky pug, and many other critters at home.

Amanda Sauri was a ward of the state who always dreamed of beating the statistics against foster children receiving a higher education degree. Today, she has only four classes left until she is able to finally make her dreams come true. As a single mother of a five-year-old and an infant, it has been challenging to reenter college. It proves to be a challenge

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

to hold sobriety along the way, but every year with persistence and dedication she is an example that it all can be done. She is very grateful for the help she has received from UW–Madison’s donors through scholarships.

Daniel Schuyler’s first time at UW–Madison did not go as anticipated, and he left school feeling discouraged. In the ensuing months, he started training as a dance instructor at Fred Astaire Dance Studios. He had no experience other than school dances and going out with friends to dance clubs. Invigorated, he practiced all the time going on to compete across the country with a professional partner. He has been teaching for 25 years and accomplished many of his goals, but finishing an undergraduate degree was always in the back of his mind. He reentered UW–Madison in the fall of 2024. Leaning on the work ethic and discipline he obtained as a dancer, and the skills he’s gained in asking for help, Daniel has found success in his studies. He credits faculty, staff, and his connections with other Native American students with facilitating his academic path. Living and working in Milwaukee, his husband, family, and boss are

huge supporters as he juggles work, family, commuting, and classes. As he completes a bachelor’s degree with double majors in history and art history, and a certificate in American Indian and Indigenous studies, he is planning his next steps. He has been accepted to the Institute of American Indian Arts for an MFA in tribal museums and cultural center administration and arts administration. Continuing from there, he plans to earn a doctorate in First Nations education.

Passionate about human rights and the environment, **Kokouvi Sedjro** attends UW Law School. Due to financial challenges, he took a break from school after graduating from the University of Lomé in Togo, Africa, and found a teaching job in a public school. This experience helps him understand challenges youths face and increases his engagement. He spends his free time writing poems to raise awareness and call to action. Moving to Madison in 2022, to join his wife with whom he has three children, he encountered cultural and linguistic barriers and is overcoming them through education. Admitted to the master of laws (LLM) program, he wants to help solve social and

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

environmental problems in our community with his new skills and multicultural background.

From Milwaukee, **Linda Araceli Serna** is a cultural worker, educator, and mother of two self-identifying boys. She has taught children to read and write in the same public school district where she became a reader herself. After 15 years of working in regular education, Linda will be pursuing a graduate degree in special education to move at the rhythm of the child, rather than at the speed of the curriculum. She believes this to be one of the most compassionate and humane approaches to educating children. Linda is also a teaching artist at Proyecto Bembé, Milwaukee's Afro-Latino cultural arts center, where she teaches an Afro-Indigenous musical tradition from Mexico known as Son Jarocho.

Lars Shimabukuro was born in Honolulu, Hawai'i and is a biracial and trans artist. They earned a bachelor's degree in studio art from Yale University in 2013, and completed Haywood Community College's professional crafts fiber program in Clyde, North Carolina in 2019. Lars has shown artwork nationally and internationally, with

shows at Tiger Strikes Asteroid Gallery in Philadelphia, the CICA Museum in Gimpo-si, Korea, and a solo exhibition at the Praxis Fiber Workshop Gallery in Cleveland, Ohio. He is currently pursuing a master's of fine arts in design studies through UW-Madison's School of Human Ecology, on unceded Ho-Chunk land.

Alex Smith is a transfer student at UW-Madison, pursuing a bachelor's degree in information science. A dedicated father of two, Alex balances part-time work, academics, and family responsibilities alongside his wife, who is also working toward a degree. Recently admitted as a junior, he is passionate about harnessing technology to address real-world challenges and build a meaningful career in the field. Scholarship support has been instrumental in helping Alex manage the financial demands of higher education, allowing him to focus on his academic goals while setting an example of resilience and determination for his children. He is thrilled to join the UW-Madison community and contribute to its legacy of innovation and excellence.

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

Heather Stoll is an undergraduate student in UW–Madison’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences pursuing her first bachelor’s degree in biology. After taking a nine-year break from education while doing seasonal work domestically, she has settled into Madison where she raises her 3-year-old son and attends school full-time. After completing a bachelor’s degree, she hopes to pursue a master’s degree in marine mycology and work to promote a healthy marine ecosystem. Her interests include bouldering, painting, baking, and bike riding.

Amie Swanson earned a bachelor’s degree in human development and family studies from UW–Madison in May 2024. Through the Badger Ready program, she was able to return to college in the fall of 2021. She is now pursuing a master’s degree in marriage and family therapy at Edgewood College. With a deep commitment to supporting individuals and families in times of need, Amie’s passion for this work stems from her own experiences with childhood trauma. Having received support from therapists and others throughout her life, she is dedicated to giving back to her community. Before embarking on

this career change, Amie spent years as a chef and food cart owner, which strengthened her love for the Madison community. She lives in Madison with her husband, son, and silver Labrador, all of whom are incredibly supportive of her career change and mission to help others.



Stacy H. Tran’s journey at UW–Madison began with Badger Ready and continued with the immense support of her advisor, friends, and family. As a first-generation student, she graduated in May 2024 with a bachelor’s degree in education studies and a certificate in Asian American studies. Stacy aspires to work in spaces that address social

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

inequities in accessing education and research culturally relevant pedagogy. She is forever grateful for the advocates in her life and the opportunities extended her way.

Erin Underwood is a graduate student at UW–Madison pursuing a master’s degree in environmental conservation. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish language from UW–Eau Claire in 2010, Erin worked in media, communications, and marketing. While she enjoyed her career, she felt called to work in the environmental sector and slowly made the transition into full-time wildlife photography and whale-watching naturalist work. Over time, Erin desired a stronger conservation-based educational foundation. That desire, coupled with the sudden loss of her mother in August 2024, led her to return to her Wisconsin roots to be closer to family and ultimately pursue a graduate degree. Erin plans to serve her community by working for an NGO or other conservation-focused organization after graduation.

Bao Vang is a first year didactic student in the physician assistant (PA) program who, despite a torturous path, has finally begun her

journey as an aspiring PA. She went to UW–Manitowoc and transferred to UW–Madison where she completed her bachelor’s degree in biology.

Rachel Walker is a returning adult student and a mother of two young children who recently made the decision to pursue a master’s degree after many years away from school while working and raising her family. She earned a bachelor’s degree in anthropology at UW–Madison and was a Powers-Knapp Scholar. She is a first-year graduate student pursuing a master’s in educational leadership policy and analysis. Rachel is an enrolled tribal citizen of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians who is passionate about Indigenous representation in K-12 curriculum, social justice, advocacy, and equity. She is inspired every day by her children, who motivate her to keep going.

Parker Wall is a 26-year old history student from New Orleans. Parker’s research draws on his personal connection to the American South, exploring the influences of religion and culture on an individual’s civic and intellectual development. Recovering from the effects of Hurricane Katrina has taken Parker

STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

the better part of two decades. After an extended time away from school, UW–Madison’s Badger Ready program built a bridge back into the otherwise unattainable academic world. Parker is grateful for the copious amount of scholarships and personal support that enable him to move beyond poverty and into a rewarding, grounded professional life.

After a 20-year break from school, **Rebekah Wilce** pursued the master of library and information studies program at UW–Madison beginning in Fall 2023. She has been a public librarian in Arizona since 2021, and she plans to continue and expand her work in public libraries before and after graduation. She is currently a bookmobile librarian to Coconino County, Arizona. Bekah’s goal is to provide exemplary reference and information service and to operate excellent public libraries that are open and accessible to people in places that need them more now than ever. She believes that providing these services is crucial work that can undermine and undo systemic injustice and help to build better, more just systems and communities.

Amber Rae Williams first became interested in public service in high school when she learned about the U.S. government disenfranchising people of color. This inspired her to pursue an undergraduate education in political science and history. After college, she attended graduate school for urban and regional planning where she interned with formerly incarcerated individuals. Her graduate work centered on creating workforce development policies for formerly incarcerated individuals, an oppressed population who often have felonies which carry severe employment barriers. She learned about the intentional marginalization of specific demographics enacted by urban planners and changed career paths. After accomplishing her dream of becoming a chef she returned to public service via graduate school to become a social justice librarian.

Keagan Williams-Salgado is the first in his family to attend college and by doing so, hopes to change the course of his family’s history. He is ambitious and determined to earn a law degree, persevering through obstacles he has faced. Driving an hour to reach campus means he will need to maintain his

car, and this scholarship will give him the necessary support to do this and pursue his goals.

Lucy Xiong began her studies at UW–Madison in 2007 but took a break from 2011 to 2015 to prioritize being a new mother to a beautiful baby girl. She returned to UW–Madison during the pandemic and completed her remaining semesters. In Spring 2022, with the ongoing support of her family, she decided to apply for pharmacy school to continue her education. It was inevitable as she was not done learning and the trajectory of her life was just beginning. Today she is finishing up her final semester of didactics before starting her clinical rotations this summer.

Britt-Marie Zeidler is a dedicated lifelong educator and learner who is currently pursuing a PhD in education. Despite facing significant challenges, including caring for her elderly mother with dementia and taking a year off to support her terminally ill father, she remains committed to her studies. Now that she has returned to her academic pursuits, Britt-Marie is determined to complete a PhD.



Acknowledgements

Adult Career and Special Student Services in the Division of Continuing Studies would like to thank the following donors for their generosity:

The **Alma Baron Second Chance for Women Scholarship** was established by **Alma Baron** in 2001 to support a female returning adult student over the age of 45, given her own personal experience of returning to college at age 51 to earn a doctorate in adult education. Following Alma's death in 2006, friends and family continue to support the fund in her memory. We are especially grateful to her daughters, Dr. Jill Baron and Professor Ellen Jo Baron, for their generous contributions.

Support by the **American Association of University Women (AAUW)–Monona/Madison Branch** dates to 1993 with the establishment of the initial **Single Parent Scholarship Fund**. In addition, our **Returning Adult Student Award** program receives funds each year in remembrance of **Annie D. Swenson** and **Lois Mathews Rosenberry**. Swenson was the first president of the Madison branch in 1909. Mathews Rosenberry was dean of women and professor of history at UW–Madison from 1911 to 1918. Both were among the founding mothers of the national AAUW.

As part of their ongoing commitment to delivering educational access to high-potential at-risk students, the **Barzilai Foundation** launched a scholarship in partnership with the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Division of Continuing Studies. The scholarship provides financial support for adult students who are working to fulfill their potential, have financial need and are facing or have overcome significant extenuating circumstances. The scholarship is designated for students pursuing fields of study that demonstrate strong employment prospects for new graduates.

Mary K. Rouse and Roger P. Bruesewitz Beyond Bars Scholarship

supports UW–Madison adult/nontraditional students, especially those with past involvement in the criminal justice system. **Roger P. Bruesewitz** spent more than a dozen years in prison and, while inside, began taking courses at UW–Madison through a study-release program. He earned a journalism degree and went on to become a copyeditor at the Law School. Roger developed a lifelong friendship with former Dean of Students Mary Rouse who was entrusted with Roger’s estate upon Roger’s death in 2019. Mary donated \$25,000 of his estate to create this scholarship.

Alumni **Joe Corry** and **Barbara Weston Corry** established the **Joe Corry and Barbara Weston Corry Scholarship Fund** in 2000 after devoting a combined 53 years to the university as academic staff members. Barbara Weston Corry retired as a senior editor at the Center for Demography and Ecology and Joe Corry as an associate vice chancellor in the Office of Academic Affairs. Their scholarship supports a single-parent student.

Crankstart is a program supported by husband and wife, Michael Moritz and Harriet Heyman. The **Crankstart Reentry Scholarship** assists nontraditional students who, after experiencing a cumulative gap in their education of five or more years, are completing a first baccalaureate degree.

To support a returning adult graduate student, **Karen Doerfer-Daily Zander** established the **Stuart Daily Seeds of Learning Fund** in 2004 in honor of the memory of Stuart G. Daily, a teacher of much to many. Daily taught in England and at UW–Madison and worked in the corporate world. Always an athlete, he died unexpectedly after leading his rugby team to victory. Daily’s most valuable asset was his knowledge, and he encouraged others to gain knowledge.

The **Nancy W. Denney Memorial Scholarship** was established by **friends, family and colleagues** in memory of Nancy Denney, a devoted professor of psychology and a single parent who died of breast cancer in 1995. The goal was to continue Denney’s advocacy for students who faced joint responsibilities of parenting, work, and study. The scholarship exists due to a generous initial contribution by the **Evjue Foundation** and contributions by numerous private donors moved by her advocacy for student-parents.

The **Sosa family** started the **Kindness Matters Scholarship** to give returning adult students with financial need and strong academic history the opportunity to focus on achieving their target degrees. Beth and Brandon's daughter Aanya chose the name Kindness Matters considering their family belief that, above all, love and kindness are most important.

The **Bernice D. Kuney Scholarship** was established in 1989 with a gift from **Edith Martindale**. It honors her mentor, Bernice Kuney. Kuney taught English for 40 years at UW–Extension, serving adults returning to college for degree work or professional development. Martindale, class of 1944, devoted her professional life to better understanding and responding to mental illness and mental disability, topics she explored in her work and writings.

The **Lisa Munro Two-Generation Scholarship** was established in 2014 and recognizes a UW Odyssey Project graduate who is working toward a degree at UW–Madison or a transfer degree at Madison College. The UW Odyssey Project provides adults facing economic barriers with a chance to start college for free. In addition to the award for the student, the scholarship also includes a next-generation gift of financial support for a young person chosen by the recipient. The second-generation gift is intended to inspire and support a child in grades K-12 by providing funding and mentoring by the Odyssey graduate.

The **Bernard Osher Foundation** seeks to improve the quality of life through support for higher education. The **Osher Reentry Scholarship Endowment** assists adults who wish to return to college to complete their undergraduate degrees after a significant break in their studies. UW–Madison is one of 88 universities nationwide selected to receive the endowment.

PLATO (Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization) is a learning-in-retirement program whose members organize and lead its courses. Historically, PLATO supported the degree-completion goals of single-parent undergraduates. Beginning in 2013, **PLATO Scholarships** became available to a broader group of returning adult and nontraditional students striving to complete UW–Madison degrees.

The University League has supported a scholarship for a returning adult student since the fund was established in 1993. In 2004, it added a second scholarship to support students, the **Cynthia McCreary Holbrook Youmans Endowed Scholarship**. This award honors a former president with a distinguished history of community and campus service.



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