



**A CELEBRATION OF**

# **OUTSTANDING ADULT STUDENTS**



**THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2026**  
**MEMORIAL UNION GREAT HALL**

# Outstanding Adult Student Celebration and Reception

## Welcome

**Sarah Stilp**, Interim associate dean and director, University Special Student Services

## Opening remarks

**Jessi Kendall**, BSN, RN, nurse clinician, UW Health

## 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, University Special Student Services

**Sarah Stilp**, Interim associate dean and director, University Special Student Services

## Transfer students (successfully completed Badger Ready requirements)

Lucas Benford

Meeah Flowers

McKayla Kratowicz

Matt Krogman

Ryan Stigen

## Graduates

Robert Foster

Lisette Lurker

Parker Wall

Claire Wieboldt

Alexander Yelinek

## Presentation of Scholarships

**Josh Juedes**, director, Visiting International Student Program, University Special Student Services

**Anne Niendorf**, scholarship coordinator, University 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, Joe Corry and Barbara Weston Corry, Bernice D. Kuney, and Returning Adult Student Scholarships

Barbara Bahr	Valerie Carrimon	Devon Havey
Emily Resendiz	Rio Sokup	Philip Turner
Rachel Walker	Sukai Yarbo	Yolanda Ziarnik

## Crankstart Reentry Scholarship

Bobby Adamo	Audrey Bohl	Anna Davies
Victoria Grman	Holly Hage	Nathan Heller
Jordan Koenig	Miguel Pingol	Cecilia Ydunate
Vivian Ye Jing Ning	Joseph Zablocki	

## Stuart Daily Seeds of Learning Scholarship

Andrea Chelsey	Catherine Haag
----------------	----------------

## Kindness Matters Scholarship

Bradley Morelli

## Lisa Munro Two-Generation Scholarship

Adrienne Farrow

## **PLATO (Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization) Scholarship**

Emily Resendiz

Philip Turner

Rachel Walker

Sukai Yarbo

## **Division of Continuing Studies Returning Adult Scholarship**

Miriam Altman

Ka'Derricka Davis

M Hamilton

Marie Kim

Taran Schlichtmann

Yolanda Ziarnik

## **University League Scholarship**

Sarah Best

## **Cynthia McCreary Holbrook Youmans University League Scholarship**

Andrea Chesley

## **Bernard Osher Reentry Scholarship**

Ceceilia Acosta Schrank

Barbara Bahr

Kyle Beckman

Anna Davies

Devon Havey

Gabi Munoz

Giulia Popp

Rio Sokup

Joshua Steward

Taryn Tsingine



## 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

**Karli John**, accessible learning technology coordinator, McBurney Disability Resource Center

**Beth Jagers**, academic advising manager, University Special Student Services

### Nominees

Danny (Shuo) Her

Jack Vaughn

### Finalists

Dee Morina

J.D. Yantz

Tamara Case

### Winners

Leslie Wright

Michael Rozier



# Student Stories

**Ceceilia Acosta Schrank** is an active-duty U.S. Navy sailor whose commitment to service began shortly after graduating high school in 2015. Throughout Ceceilia's career, she has earned a reputation for discipline, professionalism, and academic excellence. While managing operational responsibilities and supporting a family, Ceceilia completed three semesters at the University of Maryland Global Campus with a 4.0 GPA. She consistently scored in the 90th percentile on navy-wide advancement exams rising through the ranks to become a chief petty officer. She will be pursuing a bachelor's degree in mathematics at UW-Madison to further her career as a commissioned naval officer through the STA-21 program. Dedicated to mentorship, growth, and service, Ceceilia strives to make a positive impact within the navy and beyond.

**Bobby Adamo** is a father, husband, brother, son, uncle, and friend who has worked for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits for 31 years. He is a proud Chicagooan and member of Liquor Workers Union Local 3. 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 cold feet, 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. In his free time, Bobby is a basketball and lacrosse referee.

**Miriam Altman** teaches music to amazing humans at a K-6 elementary school in Shorewood. A passionate advocate for high quality music education, she has seen how experiences with creativity have unlocked children's self-expressive power, resilience, and courage. She is a single mom to two sons whose perseverance through challenges with disabilities inspire her. After nearly three decades in the classroom, she began work on a master's degree in educational psychology through the Masters of Science for Professional Educators (MSPE) program. She plans to use the knowledge gained at UW-Madison to positively

impact her coaching and mentoring work, nurturing and lifting up her fellow educators.



**Barbara Bahr** is a proud first generation student who graduated from Madison Area Technical College with a 4.0 in 2024. While Barbara was a student there, she was president of the honor society Phi Theta Kappa. One of the many projects she tackled was addressing transportation issues for the student body. Additionally, Barbara undertook volunteer work at local food pantries that addressed food insecurity. Because Barbara was married at the age of 18, and didn't pursue her education until now, she is passionate about supporting young girls in attaining higher education. After meeting her partner, who encouraged her to pursue her ambitions, she has been following her dream to become a teacher. She is

pursuing a bachelor's degree in elementary education.

**Kyle Beckman** planned to transfer to UW–Madison over 10 years ago, but due to severe depression, had to drop out during his final semester. The ensuing 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 with the realization that helping others is the only goal worthwhile to him. He started at UW–Madison in the spring of 2025 to pursue a bachelor's in health education. Kyle is passionate about making a meaningful impact on his community and believes his time at UW–Madison will enable him to do that.

**Lucas Nathaniel Benford** is a community and organization development major at UW–Madison with a passion for building local food systems. Before returning to school, Lucas gained extensive professional experience as a property manager, cafe manager, and member of an AmeriCorps restoration crew. These roles helped shape his commitment to social innovation and community-

## STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

led systemic change. He is currently focusing his academic efforts on urban agriculture, with the long-term goal of building capacity for a dedicated agricultural hub within Dane County. He intends to use his education to empower local organizations and foster more equitable, sustainable systems in the Madison area.



**Sarah Best** is a returning adult student and communications professional pursuing a master's degree in library and information science with interests in public librarianship, archives, and accessibility. After an early attempt at graduate school was interrupted by financial instability and the absence of disability diagnoses and sustained academic support, she spent over a decade building a mission-driven career in nonprofit and public-sector work. Sarah served as CEO of a digital agency supporting more than 250

nonprofit and academic clients and is currently the communications manager at the Madison Public Library Foundation. With formal diagnoses, strong self-advocacy skills, and a renewed academic focus, she is committed to lifelong learning and making libraries and educational institutions inclusive for other people with disabilities.

**Audrey Bohl** is a returning adult student majoring in management and human resources. Before returning to college full-time, she gained hands-on experience across customer service, finance, and corporate administration roles, intentionally exploring different industries to discover where she could make the greatest impact. Her experience as a training administrator at Mister Car Wash headquarters strengthened her passion for employee development and organizational support. Audrey is committed to helping individuals grow and succeed through thoughtful people practices and inclusive workplace cultures. Through her education and professional experience, she is preparing for a career in human resources leadership focused on building environments where employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to thrive.

**Valerie Carrimon** has worked as a substance abuse counselor for many years at her tribe's outpatient clinic. She is pursuing a master's degree in social work with a focus on mental health, and plans to continue her work as a counselor in her community. Valerie's most important role is that as mother to Nora Lorraine. Valerie is a facilitator of Fatherhood is Sacred/ Motherhood is Sacred and loves helping parents show up in their children's lives the way they really want to, in healthy and loving ways.

At age 38, **Tamara Case** is completing an undergraduate degree, not only to remove professional barriers, but to fulfill a long-held commitment to environmental stewardship. If circumstances would have allowed, she would have pursued a degree in ecology immediately after high school. Family responsibilities and financial instability prevented that dream at the time. Instead she completed two associate degrees at Madison Area Technical College, one in electronics, and a second in electron microscopy. But the lack of a bachelor's degree repeatedly prevented advancement for her in the workforce. Working as an engineer when she applied to UW-

Madison, she decided to return to her long-standing interest in ecology and natural resource stewardship, majoring in forestry. Now the mother of a young daughter, she balances parenting, household responsibilities, and volunteering with school work. She credits her husband and mother for being an essential part of her support system. After graduation, she will explore careers within natural resources, ideally within state government or with an NGO.

**Andrea Chesley** holds a bachelor of fine arts in choreography and a post-baccalaureate degree in secondary education from Arizona State University. She currently serves as dean of enrollment and financial aid at Wayland Academy in Beaver Dam, after relocating from East Hampton, New York, where she was director of enrollment management at Ross School. Previously, she served as assistant director of admissions at Idyllwild Arts Academy in Southern California. Earlier in her career, Andrea lived and worked in Los Angeles, pursuing dance, acting, and stand-up comedy while continuing to teach and coach. She is a founding board member of Kern Dance Alliance and enjoys writing, travel, and food.

## STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

**Anna Davies** grew up in Kansas, came from a poor educational background, and didn't start college until age 25. No one in her family had gone to college, and she dreamed of being the first. She tried once and found that the degree she earned didn't feel like what she was supposed to be doing. Feeling adrift, she found a childhood love of maps calling her back and found that spark that she'd been looking for. Now she wants to earn a master's degree in geographic information systems and use it to help preserve what few wild spaces we have left for those yet to come.

From Chicago, **Ka'Derricka Davis** is a third-year medical student at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. She earned a bachelor's degree in biological science. Prior to medical school she worked in clinical research and earned a master's degree in public health. She completed a thesis on Black low-birth weights at a Chicago-land hospital and a developed strategic framework for future health system interventions. During medical school she took several leadership roles in Student National Medical Association (as president) and the MEDiC Student Run Clinic (as a

referrals coordinator and family shelter health educator).

**Adrienne Farrow** is a 32-year-old single mother living in Cottage Grove, currently enrolled in 18 credits through Madison Area Technical College and the UW Odyssey Project. She is proud to share that she is maintaining strong academic standing. Her long-term goals include graduating from UW-Madison with a bachelor's degree majoring in information technology and business management, as well as obtaining a grant writing certificate. On a personal note, Adrienne shared that this coming September she will mark four years of sobriety. She attributes much of her success to the support of the Odyssey program, along with her own dedication to being the best mother and individual she can be. She shares the Lisa Munro Two-Generation scholarship with her daughter, Adore.

**Shameeah "Meeah" Flowers**, is a social welfare major at UW-Madison and a graduate of the Badger Ready program. Following a 13-year career in management and earning an associate degree from Madison Area Technical College, she is now a certified peer specialist

and a devoted Christian, active in her church weekly. She also enjoys practicing American Sign Language (ASL) and traveling to professional conferences, including an upcoming Peer Recovery Conference.

**Robert Foster** has always loved problem-solving, puzzles, and especially math. He'd also flatter himself by thinking that he's decent at math. For years, he intended to study math and start a career that, at the very least, heavily involves it. Despite his best efforts, he had to put this plan on hold for a few years. He finally felt ready to move forward towards his goals again, and joined the Badger Ready program. In 2025, Robert graduated with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and a certificate in computer science. He is extremely grateful to UW-Madison in general and the Badger Ready program specifically, for giving him the opportunity to pursue his dreams once more.

Originally from Cleveland, **Victoria Grman** is a first-generation student pursuing a bachelor's degree in genetics with certificates in folklore and fermented food and beverage. After a five-year hiatus, she returned to college with a goal of becoming a physician who

advocates for women's health. Her path is shaped by firsthand experience in navigating her own health concerns, which revealed the need for compassionate, attentive care. A lover of sport and fitness, Victoria also interns for the Ohio Senior Olympics and teaches yoga to students of all levels.

**Catherine Haag** is a mother, daughter, and dedicated social worker. She started her educational journey differently than some, having her first child while still in high school. Catherine did not let that stop her. She graduated early and began taking college classes online. Catherine completed an associate degree then attended night classes to obtain a bachelor's degree. She had aspirations to go on for a master's degree, but prioritized her child and chose to start a career. Catherine has never given up her dream of graduating with a master's degree in social work, and after 18 years as a social worker, she was finally able to return to school. Catherine started at UW-Madison in the fall of 2025.

**Holly Hage** is a forth-generation nurse who found her calling in the emergency room. She holds degrees in critical care

## STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

paramedicine. She wants to show her daughter that there is good in the world, and that she should always try to help those in their greatest time of need.

**M Hamilton** was born in 1983, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. They are an artist and researcher who engages curiosity with multi-modal practices across media including: situation and social practice, research-as-practice, documentation installation, and writing. Hamilton is a dissertator in the Department of Art History at UW–Madison, and a 2024 graduate of the studio art MFA in the performance and time-based media area. In 2021, Hamilton earned a bachelor’s degree in art history with minors in sculpture and intermedia and Appalachian studies from Berea College, in Berea, Kentucky. Before returning to academic research, they worked across many fields, including farming, photography, and midwifery.

**Devon Havey**, a first-generation student born and raised in Green Bay, spent his early adulthood pursuing a career as a chef, a childhood dream of his. As the years went on, Devon found he was no longer happy in the restaurant industry. But as a 26-year-old,

he felt it was “too late” for him to pursue a degree. Through therapy, he was able to overcome this false belief, and in the process of doing so, became interested in therapy as a profession. He enrolled at UW–Green Bay to major in psychology. After one year, he transferred to UW–Madison with hopes of pursuing graduate school and reaching his full potential.

Homegrown Wisconsinite, **Nathan Heller**, always dreams big. They are pursuing a bachelor’s degree in computer engineering to develop ways to power humanity sustainably. They transferred to UW–Madison’s College of Engineering from Madison Area Technical College in the spring of 2026 with four semesters to go. Between graduating high school in 2015 and starting this degree in 2023, Nathan spent time in the workforce advancing their troubleshooting skills as a maintenance technician. Along the way, they also developed a personal finance application and completed an associate degree in business management. Currently, they run their own business, Home Fixer LLC, repairing homes in the Madison area. They have also joined UW–Madison’s WiscWind group, eager to dive into renewable energy.

When **Shuo “Danny” Her** graduates this year, he will be the first in his family to earn a bachelor’s degree. His parents are Hmong refugees who fled Laos during the Secret War. Danny found public school challenging to navigate, struggling to balance his Hmong and American identities. Attending Madison Area Technical College right out of high school did not go well for him, but when he returned more than 10 years later, it was with a different mindset and goals. Earning a perfect 4.0 GPA, he graduated from MATC and transferred to UW–Madison. He joined the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery (WID) as an undergraduate designer and contributed to the interdisciplinary research team. He was fortunate to complete an internship in Vietnam which helped him achieve his professional goals while reconnecting with his ancestral roots. He will graduate with a major in design, innovation, and society.

**Marie Kim** is a reentry undergraduate student currently majoring in chemistry and materials science and engineering. Her passion for chemistry and science drives her determination to finish her education after a medical break.

**Jordan Koenig** is a dedicated returning adult student in the UW–Madison Online business administration–management program, balancing a demanding full-time career with raising three children and supporting her family. Many of her study hours take place late at night, after long workdays, once her children are asleep. Despite competing responsibilities, she remains deeply committed to her education and personal growth. With a strong academic record and extensive professional experience in finance and operations, Jordan brings purpose and resilience to every course. She is motivated by a desire to build a better future for her family and to show her children the power of perseverance. In her limited free time, she assists with youth sports, reflecting her commitment to service and community.

**McKayla Kratowicz** returned to school in fall of 2025, after past struggles completing her education. She was honored and grateful to be a part of the Badger Ready program and for all the help she received along the way. To her, education means building a foundation to pay it forward and be of service to others. She is studying art and

## STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

education for social justice, hoping to become an art therapist. She is interested in how art can be used as an avenue of change, connection, and social engagement, and believes that right now is a particularly opportune time for self-expression and art to help make sense of the world around us.

**Matt Krogman** is a Madison native with a lifelong connection to UW–Madison and the community. After high school, he studied engineering before realizing his interests were better aligned with business and the built environment. After completing coursework at Madison Area Technical College, he began a career in real estate and development. Starting in business and commercial lending at U.S. Bank, he later moved into development and construction leadership roles and now serves as director of development at Forward Development Group. Matt is currently seeking to complete a bachelor's degree in real estate and urban land economics while balancing full-time professional responsibilities and fulfilling a long-standing goal of graduating as a Wisconsin Badger.

**Lisette Lurker** was born and raised in Mexico City. She originally studied computer engineering and began working in the technology sector, gaining practical experience in robotics while participating in international robotics events between 2007 and 2017.

Through these experiences, she discovered her interest in research and mentoring new robotics participants. When Lisette moved to Madison, she faced major life challenges while adapting to a new language and culture. Through the Badger Ready program, she was able to continue her education. Lisette is currently completing a bachelor's degree in information science with a certificate in digital studies at UW–Madison, focusing on human–computer interaction and educational robotics.

**Bradley Morelli** is a graduate of Carthage College, where he majored in English, philosophy, and political science. In his free time, he runs a book club, obsesses over the electric guitar, and like any true philosopher, watches a good deal of Packers football. Bradley is currently a 1L at UW Law School, and he hopes to practice public interest law.



**Dee Morina** returned to the classroom after nearly two decades away. As a young mother, her priorities shifted from education to raising her children. But it was her children who pushed her to finally return to her studies. In the interim, she was an entrepreneur running a couple of small businesses near campus while raising her family. When she chose UW–Madison, it felt like coming back to a place where she had been connected for a long time. Academic challenges are managed with a full life outside of school. As a single parent, even though they are older now, her kids still rely on her in many ways. She studied abroad in London, volunteered with community organizations, and helped her kids, all while managing school. After graduating this year, she plans to pursue a master’s degree.

Born and raised in Wisconsin, **Gabi Munoz** is a first-generation college student who graduated in 2021 from UW–Madison with a bachelor’s degree in biology. Since graduating, she has gained professional experience, including working at UW Hospital as a nursing assistant and most recently working with breast cancer patients as a clinical research coordinator. She will start nursing school in 2026 to complete a BSN, as helping patients is a passion of hers. Gabi has a beautiful 9-month-old baby boy who has brought immense joy to her life. She loves being outdoors, visiting family in Colorado, skiing in the Rocky mountains, and spending time with friends and family.

**Miguel Pingol** entered his junior year of high school with financial concerns and lack of direction clouding his post-graduation plans. Seeking stability, he turned to the military, spending nearly 10 years in the U.S. Army working on intelligence systems worldwide. He decided to return to school post-service, enrolling at UW–Madison in 2023. Surrounded by big cities most of his life, he has witnessed firsthand the effects of good and bad urban planning. Miguel is currently finishing a bachelor’s

## STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

degree in landscape and urban studies with a certificate in public policy towards the goal of using sustainable development to make cities better for all, both in the present and future.

**Giulia Popp** is a reentry undergraduate student currently majoring in math and computer science. After leaving UW–Madison during the pandemic, she moved back to Atlanta to live with her parents. While there, she started working in a deli where she handled Wisconsin’s pride and joy, cheese! During this time, she gained a desire to eventually do graduate work in statistics and have a career working for the government as a statistician. She eventually found her way back to Madison in 2023 and got a night shift job working at UW–Madison. After some time away, she restarted her education at Madison Area Technical College, and was allowed to reenter UW–Madison in the spring of 2026. Outside of work and school, she enjoys cooking and reading.

**Emily Resendiz** has enjoyed reading since the first day of kindergarten when she insisted her mom take her to the library and teach her to read. Fast forward several years and she has turned her passion into a career as

a library director. Overnight she became the sole parent of two young children. As a single mom, she knew just how important a library can be. In 2025, she applied and was accepted at UW–Madison to pursue a master’s degree in library science. While attending school part-time and working full-time has been a challenge, she looks forward to sharing what she learns with the community that she serves.

In the years following high school, **Michael Rozier** provided end-of-life care for his maternal grandmother, an experience that continues to shape how he understands care and responsibility. After moving to Wisconsin with his wife while she attended law school, he enrolled in the cabinetmaking program at Madison Area Technical College, his first experience with higher education. He completed the program in 2019 and began working in woodworking before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted that path. After facing personal health challenges, Michael returned to MATC to pursue a liberal arts degree through the transfer program. With steady support from his wife, he continued his education and transferred to UW–Madison,

where he is now, as a 33-year-old completing his final semester as a gender and women's studies major. He plans to pursue graduate study in industrial and organizational psychology.



**Taran Schlichtmann** is a dedicated single parent and graduate student pursuing a master of science in data, insights, and analytics at UW–Madison. He brings a background in biology, healthcare quality assurance, and advanced analytics, along with a strong commitment to improving healthcare systems through data-driven strategy. As a returning adult student, he balances full-time work, parenting, and graduate studies

while maintaining high academic performance and a clear vision for his future. Taran is passionate about using data to strengthen healthcare operations, enhance patient outcomes, and build more human-centered systems. His long-term goals include contributing to healthcare innovation and expanding opportunities for others through mentorship and community engagement.

Born and raised in northern Wisconsin, **Rio Sokup** showed a passion for art since her mother let her color on her bedroom walls at age seven. Rio has returned to Madison as an adult student pursuing a bachelor's degree in art to showcase her infatuation for bright pops of color, swirling textures, and whimsical designs. She aims to take the skills and foundation Madison has provided and bring a slice of the local art life back to her home town.

Twenty years after initially planning to transfer to UW–Madison, **Joshua Steward** has finally reached that goal. Following a sufficient meditation and study of their own heart and lifeway, they have reentered higher education and are continuing on an academic path toward a first bachelor's degree. During their educational

## STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

break, Joshua was interested in volunteering; environmental issues concerning waste, food sovereignty, vegetable gardening, helping on farms, exploring subsistence agriculture and visiting such communities and homesteads; self-directed study of identifying plants from the Wisconsin flora; foraging; and non-intensive propagation of trees and shrubs. Though they still hang out in woodlands and herbaria, Joshua is studying linguistics and creative writing at UW–Madison.

**Ryan Stigen** is a returning adult student who joined the Badger Ready program in fall of 2025. He was admitted as a transfer student for spring 2026.

**Taryn “TJ” Tsingine** is a member of the Navajo Nation first and a mixed media artist second. They grew up in Tuba City, Arizona where they explored abandoned buildings with their cousins, got chased by wild dogs, and developed a love for coloring on the walls. They cite Walter Wick as their first inspiration, as Wick’s *I Spy* books showed them how beautiful clutter can be, and what it means to take your time in designing something you love. They dream of one day becoming

a children’s book illustrator, driven by the belief that all kids deserve to feel seen.



**Phil Turner** launched his nineteen-year career with Teach For America in Baltimore. He spent the next decade teaching in Baltimore-area private schools, where he led 10 track and cross-country teams to state championships. In 2024, Phil returned to his roots to teach in the School District of Reedsburg. Balancing his roles as a dedicated educator, high school sports official, and father of five, he is now focused on school leadership. Phil is pursuing a master’s degree in educational leadership and policy analysis as part of the Wisconsin Idea Principal Preparation Program.

After high school, **Jack Vaughn** spent years bouncing between jobs, none of which made him feel like he was contributing to the broad systemic problems in the world. Initially, he didn't want to attend college, especially with no clear end goal in sight. But after working for a few years, he realized that to make an impact on world problems, he would need more skills. He learned about Bucky's Tuition Promise and the transfer contract option at Madison Area Technical College, realizing that there was a path to higher education for him. While at UW-Madison, he has balanced his classwork, a highly technical and fast-paced remote job, and the ups and downs of health issues. In his topological data analytics course, his favorite, he had the opportunity to engage with high-level research doing a project and presenting about it, which he found exhilarating. He will graduate this spring with a bachelor's degree in data science and hopes to pursue graduate work in statistics.

**Rachel Walker** is a returning adult student, and mother of two young children, who recently made the decision to pursue a master's degree after many years away working and raising her family. She

earned an undergraduate degree at UW-Madison in anthropology and is a graduate student pursuing a master's in the educational leadership policy and analysis program. She is a 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, Javi and Santi, whose boundless energy, positivity, curiosity, and joy in this world motivate her to work towards reimagining a better world for them.

**Parker Wall** is a graduating history major from New Orleans. His work centers around community organization, and he seeks to expand opportunities for nontraditional students. Parker is currently working as the community outreach manager for the Dyscalculia Training and Research Institute, and as a development associate for the Madison Reading Project. Both of these roles prioritize extending access to education for underrepresented learners.

**Claire Wieboldt** is an incoming library and information studies (LIS) graduate student and future

## STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

librarian. She joined the Badger Ready program as a prospective computer sciences student, but her plans changed when she unexpectedly fell in love with her job in a local public library. The unique blend of serving the community, working in a dynamic environment, and of course, being surrounded by books, prompted her to major in the adjacent field of information science. She has since had the opportunity to work with iSchool professor Megan Adams on a web application for Middleton Public Library, and she presented on the development process at the 2025 Wisconsin Library Association conference. She is excited to continue exploring the intersection of technology and librarianship in the master's LIS program.

**Leslie Wright's** decision to return to school was shaped by community need, personal conviction, and the encouragement of those around her. While raising her children, she became active in the parent teacher organization (PTO), and she established a PTO when her children transitioned to a new school. This led her to run for a seat on the district school board. She was elected and is beginning her fifth year of service. In this work, she

had access to data that showed the continuing rise of mental health concerns among students and staff. Confronted with the growing need and her own passion in the subject, she made the decision to return to school to become a counselor. After graduation, she will be attending the clinical rehabilitation counseling master's program on campus and will pursue her Licensed Professional Counselor-in-Training (LPC-IT) to work directly with adolescents facing mental health challenges.

In her first attempt at college, **J.D. Yantz** struggled in her classes and realized she needed to step away to begin working and hopefully find a direction. She spent eight years working in a dental office, and earned her dental hygiene license. Relocating to Wisconsin from Alabama with her husband for his work, she worked as a dental assistant because her hygiene license didn't transfer. After her dad's traumatic brain injury, she witnessed the important role nurses play in family and patient care. She felt a strong pull towards nursing but being out of college for 12 years brought self-doubt. She was pregnant with her first child when she started nursing school in the fall of 2022. Another family crisis led her to take

a two-year break, but she returned to school in fall 2024, balancing motherhood, family support, and her coursework. She will graduate this year and hopes to work as a registered nurse in a postpartum or labor and delivery setting.

**Sukai Yarbo** is a dedicated second-year graduate student studying to become a special education teacher. As a single parent, she faces significant challenges in balancing her educational goals with her responsibilities at home. Her journey is driven by a deep passion for making a positive impact on children who need extra support. However, Sukai's financial situation often adds stress to her pursuit of education. Despite these obstacles, she remains committed to her studies and aspires to become a compassionate and skilled educator. She believes that with the right support, she can achieve her goals and set a positive example for her child, showing that hard work can lead to success.

In 2018 **Cecilia Ydunate** (Guerrero) attended UW–Madison in person as a first-generation student. Due to extenuating circumstances and severe depression, she needed to leave to take care of her mental

health. During this time away she worked on building her professional career in management, administrative positions, and trade show planning. It became clear that if she wanted to do more with her career, she needed a degree. Her husband encouraged her to reapply to UW–Madison and work with an advisor for next steps. With the help of Randy Gentile and staff, she completed and passed her first semester of college after her time away. She hopes to work with nonprofits and client engagements after graduation.

**Vivian Ye Jing Ning** is a bachelor of fine arts degree candidate at UW–Madison. A first-generation student from an immigrant family, her early academic path was shaped by financial pressures, family responsibilities, and the challenges of navigating unfamiliar academic structures. This led to a nine-year pause before returning to higher education in 2023 with a renewed clarity and commitment to art. Her interdisciplinary practice spans multimedia and immersive installation, weaving together themes of ecological precarity, social systems, and human environments. Through sensory, research-driven approaches, her work invites reflection on

## STUDENT STORIES *(continued)*

interconnectedness and shared responsibility within broader ecological networks. She plans to pursue graduate study to continue developing socially engaged work that fosters community dialogue, environmental awareness, and transformative ways of seeing.



School was difficult for **Alexander Yelinek**, so he developed coping mechanisms to help him graduate from high school. After working and gaining some maturity for a couple of years, he realized he wanted to join the United States Marine Corps (USMC) where he qualified for the prestigious Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) specialist training program.

Through this program and his time in the military, he discovered his love for chemistry. He started at UW–Madison with the Badger Ready program after his honorable discharge from the USMC and was admitted as a transfer student for summer 2021. Alexander graduated in 2025 with a bachelor's degree in environmental sciences.

**Joseph Zablocki** is a dedicated nonprofit professional and returning adult student committed to serving veterans and their families. He works with a veteran-focused organization in Milwaukee, where he supports individuals facing housing instability, mental health challenges, and other barriers to stability. As a father of three, Joseph balances family life, work, and higher education with determination and purpose. His academic goals center on strengthening his leadership, communication, and program development skills to create more effective support systems for veterans in crisis. Driven by both personal and professional experiences, he aspires to expand his impact through community partnerships and initiatives that improve long-term outcomes for veterans across Wisconsin.

**Yolanda Ziarnik** is a special education teacher and case manager in Wisconsin with a focus on inclusive, asset-based practices for multilingual learners and students with disabilities. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in educational leadership and policy analysis through the UW-Madison's online program. Yolanda's professional interests include equity-centered leadership, restorative systems of support, literacy development, and building sustainable school practices that center relationships and trust. Her work is informed by both classroom experience and leadership preparation, with the goal of strengthening systems that better serve students, families, and educators. Yolanda plans to complete her program in the fall of 2026 and continue advocating for inclusive and equitable educational leadership.



# Acknowledgements

University 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)–Greater Madison Area 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.

The **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 to honor 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.

## Sponsors

- Division of Student Life, Office of Student Assistance and Support
- McBurney Disability Resource Center
- Office of Child Care and Family Resources
- Division of Continuing Studies, University Special Student Services
- Private donors

## Special thanks to

### Outstanding Undergraduate Returning Adult Student Awards Committee

Dr. Elton Crim

Mari Magler

DJ Mattison

Patricia Ruppert

Sarah Stilp, co-chair

Beth Jagers, co-chair

### Scholarship Committee

Martina Diaz

Ace Hilliard

Stacy Iruk

Beth Jagers

Anne Niendorf, chair

Contributions to our scholarships and awards are greatly appreciated. To make a donation please visit [specialstudents.wisc.edu/give](https://specialstudents.wisc.edu/give), or contact Colleen Johnson at [colleen.johnson@wisc.edu](mailto:colleen.johnson@wisc.edu).



You may also scan here to make a donation.



