A CELEBRATION OF
Outstanding Adult Students

WEDNESDAY  ■  APRIL 24, 2024
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
Joe Rasmussen, director, University Veterans Services

Recognition of Badger Ready graduates and transfer students
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)

Lisette Lurker  Brigitte Mellott  Claire Wieboldt

Graduates
Eligh Alvarez  Signe Kilmer  Annie Lewis
Hezouwe Walada  Jaime Wendt

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.
Alma Baron Second Chance for Women Scholarship
Kris Adams  Emily Akins  Anabelle Fritz

American Association of University Women-Monona/Madison Branch Scholarship
Skye Moss

Barzilai Foundation Scholarship
Stephan Blanz  Turkessa Hayes  Kathleen Kemnitz
Anna Knezic  Sarah O’Donnell  Shannon Stege

Joe Corry and Barbara Weston Corry Scholarship
Anna (LaMonica) Lonergan  Julie Winkelmann

Crankstart Reentry Scholarship
Alex Busse  Kami Clerkin  Deann Crawford
Jordan Hynum  Rachel Kane  Autumn Kohler
Dustin McKindsey  Bianca Navari  Amanda Sauri
Claire Wieboldt

Stuart Daily Seeds of Learning Scholarship
Kirsten Armour  Bekah Wilce

Nancy W. Denney Memorial Scholarship
Skye Moss

Kindness Matters Scholarship
Sartu Taha

Lisa Munro Two-Generation Scholarship
Otis Harris, Jr.
Bernice D. Kuney Scholarship
Anthony Basso          Bao Vang

PLATO (Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization) Scholarship
Jason Cretton          Brian Goodman          Alice Owiti
Ashley Spink

Returning Adult Scholarship
Kirsten Armour          Jason Cretton          Jason Houge
Anna (LaMonica) Lonergan Amy Moreland          Agnes Moreno
Ashley Portillo Recinos Mary Pulchinski          Julie Winkelmann
Alexandra Yokomizo

Mary K. Rouse & Roger P. Bruesewitz Beyond Bars Scholarship
Jesse Anderson

Single Parent Undergraduate Scholarship
Kiria-Leah Johnen          Amanda Sauri          Arabela Wiley

University League Scholarship
Wei Du

Cynthia McCreary Holbrook Youmans University League Scholarship
Emily Akins

Bernard Osher Reentry Scholarship
Max Edmonds          Amy Elbe          Nolan Frank
Amber Kirkpatrick      Christopher Malecki          Amy Moreland
Qinghua Shang          Parker Wall          Zalissa Zongo Kafando
Gabriela Zumwalt
Outstanding Undergraduate Returning Adult Student Awards

These awards were established in 1981 by the Dean of Students Office to honor returning adults who have arrived at senior status while juggling all the commitments of adult life. As the call for nominees states, these are students “whose unusual determination and perseverance have enabled them to pursue academic goals and to contribute to the community by demonstrated leadership and/or service.”

Presentation of Adult Student Awards

Christina Olstad, dean of students, Student Affairs
Sarah Stilp, assistant dean, Adult Career and Special Student Services

Nominees
Tsurit Barhama
Joel Joseph Rausch
James Spoden

Finalists
Qianna Loomis
Rebecca Parmentier
Hollie Wierschke

Winners
Dora Aranda
Norman Canestorp
Jennifer Halvorson
Student Stories

**Kris Adams** is a graduate student in UW–Madison’s School of Journalism. Her interests include audio storytelling and essay writing on a wide range of topics including women’s studies and ethics in journalism. She is currently working on a book detailing her time working for hospice during the pandemic. She is mother to three wonderful kids and lives north of Madison in the quiet town of DeForest.

In 2008, **Jesse Anderson**, began his education at UW Oshkosh, Fox Cities (formerly UW Fox Valley) and transferred to UW–Milwaukee. His interests have always been under the umbrella of social science and communication, which he hoped to apply by helping struggling people achieve a better quality of life. That interest was born out of his experience with childhood trauma and opiate addiction. He realized he needed to learn something deeper about humanity through direct experience, so he dropped out to seek it. For six years, he alternated between working in construction in Wisconsin, and traveling and living in 25 countries. He returned to his education at UW–Madison through the Badger Ready program. He took a break in 2022 to volunteer in Ukraine and recently returned. He also recently learned he is neurodivergent, which has helped him understand why some things have been so challenging and different for him. His goal is still to help others, and now he hopes to do that through sharing his stories and insight, supported by what he’s learned in academia.

**Dora Aranda** is a mother of three children, former business owner, and nontraditional student. After almost losing her life in a car accident and suffering a traumatic brain injury which took months of therapy and rehabilitation, she moved from California to Wisconsin. She felt as if she

**Eligh Alvarez** graduated in December with distinction. After leaving Northwestern University without earning a degree in 2016, he joined the Air National Guard to train as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technician. His years in the military have taught him the skills needed for immense personal growth and for success in school. Starting his return to college with the Badger Ready program in the fall of 2021, Eligh studied computer science and earned a bachelor’s degree from UW–Madison. He continues to serve as an EOD team leader in the Air National Guard.

After making the difficult decision to take a break from school due to financial challenges **Emily Akins** was able to return to her studies in the Fall of 2021. She is a graduate student in the master of social work program at UW–Madison with a focus on mental health. After she graduates and earns her license as a clinical social worker, Emily will expand her current business, Naturally Listening, LLC. Her goal is to serve a wider population as a Spanish speaking psychotherapist and to make her services accessible and affordable to all clients. At the same time, she will work on social justice issues she is passionate about including poverty and homelessness.

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was meant to do more so took a leap of faith and enrolled at Madison Area Technical College where she earned an associate degree in liberal arts. Dora is passionate about making a difference locally and globally which led her to major in biochemistry at UW–Madison. The last few years have brought many challenges: the pandemic, health, family struggles, and financial barriers, but with the help of her advisor, she connected with the resources and support she needed to persist. In an effort to give back and to share her experiences and toolbox of resources with her peers, she has become involved with the Center for Educational Opportunity. Dora strives to use her degree to solve environmental and public health problems to better the world, and hopes to expose more women and people of underrepresented backgrounds to STEM fields.

Kirsten Armour is a sole parent who completed a degree in criminal justice from the University of Northwestern – Saint Paul in 2013. They went on to provide legal and shelter services to domestic violence victims in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. When their daughter was born, they relocated back to Wisconsin to pursue work in county government. They worked as an economic support supervisor for over a year, creating connections and gaining knowledge. In 2019 they began work at the county’s Aging and Disability Resource Center. For nearly five years, they have worked to advocate, educate, and advance disability services; they also brought over $1,000,000.00 in Federal funds to local residents by means of benefit approval.

Kirsten is actively applying this same energy to a master of social work degree.

Tsurti Barhama is is graduating this May with a bachelor’s degree in economics and math, and a data science certificate.

Anthony Basso is a returning student at UW–Madison pursuing a degree to teach health and physical education, with a concentration in adapted physical education. He graduated with a degree in kinesiology in 2021, following a 10-year hiatus after high school part of which he spent in military service. After recovering from a Covid-related stroke, he was inspired to change his career goal to teaching to help young people live healthier lives. A lifelong Wisconsinite, he is thrilled to have the opportunity to be a part of the solution to the state’s critical teacher shortage and contribute to the school system.

Stephan Blanz comes from a family of immigrants. Following eight years of honorable service in the United States military, he embarked on an educational journey with the goal of one day becoming a physician. Inspired by his military background, years as a volunteer EMT, and his work as a biomedical engineer, he values the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to both academia and his local community. Amid the challenges he has faced during his lifetime, he is driven by resiliency and a commitment to service. His ultimate goal is to leave a lasting impact on both healthcare and his community.
Alex Busse was born in Randolph, Wisconsin and moved to Madison before starting kindergarten. Before finishing elementary school he moved to Spain with his mom and sister, living there for three years before moving back to Madison. He took college classes while in high school, graduating from La Follette. After high school he felt burned-out and was not sure about what to do with his life. He started doing odd jobs like babysitting and landscaping. It took some time but Alex decided he wanted to return to school to pursue math and physics, with the intention of becoming a professor. In his free time he plays rugby, coaches special Olympics, and fosters dogs.

Deann Crawford is a returning adult student after 20 years in the workforce. She built a career in the nonprofit sector and hopes to use the knowledge she gains through a management degree to help mission-based organizations stay financially healthy. After completing an associate degree in accounting at Milwaukee Area Technical College, she enrolled in the online business management program through UW–Madison. Born, raised, and still residing in Milwaukee, Deann enjoys traveling and has been to over 14 countries and counting.

Jason Cretton is a Wisconsin native living in a small town along the border with Michigan’s Upper Peninsula where he grew up. He is a first-generation, 46-year-old, physically disabled graduate student in the mechanical engineering: sustainable systems engineering program at UW–Madison. He graduated from
UW–Platteville in 2022 with a bachelor’s degree in sustainability and renewable energy systems, with an emphasis in design and analysis. Returning to classes as a 40-year-old paraplegic was not easy but has led to him being the first person in his family to complete a bachelor’s degree. He plans to work on high performance buildings and residences as a project manager and energy engineer, incorporating green building principles and renewable energy systems into their designs.

Wei Du, a former fashion designer, settled in Madison in 2014. In 2017, building a family in the U.S., she joyfully welcomed a daughter who underwent open-heart surgery as a two-month-old. Desiring a furry companion, Wei Du faces restrictions from her housing association. Motivated to enhance her family’s life, she seeks education and skills to reenter society and aspires to provide her daughter the joy of having a pet. Inspired by volunteering at Harvest Food Bank, Wei Du eagerly anticipates contributing her energy back to the community. As a nontraditional student, Wei Du is pursuing a master’s degree in data insight and analytics, demonstrating resilience and determination in navigating her unique journey of personal and societal betterment.

Max Edmonds is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in psychology. After his 2014 high school graduation, he attended Macalester College in St. Paul. Suffering from depression and anxiety, and struggling with ADHD, he decided to transfer to UW–Madison in 2015. He left in 2016 as he required more intensive treatment for depression. Starting in 2017, he worked at low-paying jobs. However, as he applied for higher paying jobs, he noticed that he was being turned down due to the lack of a college degree. This started him thinking about finishing a degree. He returned in fall 2023 and plans to pursue a master’s degree in counseling psychology to serve neurodivergent young adults.

Amy Elbe’s family has attended and graduated from UW–Madison for generations, including her grandfather, father, uncle, and both her children. Becoming a UW–Madison alumna is a goal and source of pride for her entire family. Amy moved to Madison after high school to attend UW–Madison. After completing general education courses, she transferred to Madison Area Technical College to complete two associate degrees. She took a break from college to raise a family and start a career as a veterinary technician. She has been active in the veterinary community working in private practice, doing community work with Madison Cat Project, helping educate veterinary students at Madison College and UW–Madison, and working on the Access to Veterinary Care Coalition Project.

Nolan Frank is a creative instructional designer, teacher, student, and artist. With a background in secondary education, community arts, and nonprofit work, he is exploring a burgeoning professional role in higher-education innovation. He is currently studying the neuroscience and psychology of creativity and has been invited to join an educational psychology neuroscience
lab. He is merging these academic pursuits with his skills as a composer, in collaboration with artists and musicians in the Mead Witter School of Music and across campus. He is exceptionally grateful for both the Badger Ready program, and especially for the Returning Adult Scholarships/Adult Career and Special Student Services crew. He thanks you all so much for your continued support and vows to perennially pay these things forward.

**Anabelle Fritz** found that being a stay-at-home mother for 18 years has had its rewards and setbacks. Although the moments she shared with her family were priceless, it was hard to give up her career goals. Anabelle had accepted what she thought was her fate until divorce left her unable to provide for her children. It was a bittersweet moment in her life, but now she can finally focus on a professional life and regain her independence at the age of 48. She hopes to graduate next spring, then pursue a master’s degree and a career in teaching students with special needs. In Anabelle’s words, it just goes to show something positive can come out of an unfortunate situation.

**Brian Goodman** is a devoted family man with an unwavering desire to make a positive impact on the environment for the sake of future generations. He has always put his family first and strived to provide them with a secure and nurturing environment. Brian’s love for his family motivates him to work towards creating a better world, not just for his own children but for all children to come. He actively seeks opportunities to educate and raise awareness in his community about the importance of sustainable living. He is involved in local environmental organizations, where he volunteers his time and expertise to promote eco-friendly practices, organize clean-up campaigns, and advocate for policies that protect the environment.

At age 19, **Jennifer Halvorson** dropped out of college at the encouragement of her partner. She then found herself supporting that partner through opiate addiction. Work kept her from returning to education successfully as finances were a strain. When her partner chose addiction over her, she picked up the pieces to start again, pursuing surgical technology at Madison Area Technical College. She worked as a surgical technologist for eight years and obtained her nursing assistant certification during the pandemic. Jennifer discovered she loved interacting with patients and was inspired by the nurses she worked with throughout the pandemic. This led to her decision to pursue a nursing degree at UW–Madison where her wealth of personal and professional experience has served her well in her coursework and research. An honors student, Jennifer was selected by the School of Nursing to present at the Midwest Nursing Research Society Conference in February.

**Otis Harris, Jr.** graduated from the UW Odyssey Project in 2009 and has combined fatherhood, school, ministry, support of his siblings, and multiple jobs as he makes his way toward a degree. He describes himself as overcoming adversity and driven by a desire to set a powerful example for his
children. Otis will use part of his two-generation scholarship to provide customized lessons for Penelope, his five-year-old daughter who loves music and the arts but has severe hearing impairments. Otis hopes to pursue a degree in business and to establish a company that helps others gain employment. He expresses his deep gratitude to Lisa Munro and her family situations. Needing independence, school was an exceptional challenge due to personal challenges in her life; including learning to manage her severe anxiety. In 2024, at the age of 25, Jordan is ready and excited to continue her education at UW–Madison to earn a bachelor’s degree in marketing so she can continue to grow and better serve her community and those around her.

Since the age of eight, **Kiria-Leah Johnen** has dreamed of working in a career involving children. Kiria was given the opportunity to teach religious education to kindergartners and first graders during her last two years of high school. This opportunity proved that teaching young students was her passion. After enrolling in UW–Madison to pursue a bachelor’s degree in elementary education, Kiria became pregnant. During the spring of her freshman year, she had a baby girl. Being a single parent and attending college was difficult, but it didn’t deter her from persevering towards her goals. Kiria aspires to be a teacher who encourages children to
STUDENT STORIES (continued)

learn from their mistakes, understand their emotions, and be inclusive of all backgrounds.

Rachel Kane is a mom, wife, and project coordinator on a dynamic, fast-paced team in mergers, acquisitions and divestures—all while pursuing a degree in business administration with a focus on human resources. Her passion for leadership and talent development can be seen in both her professional and personal life. She loves strategic planning and learning new skills, is organized, creative, and always willing to help solve a problem. Beyond her normal role at work, she also volunteers with the Community of Practice for Office Support Professionals helping the community share knowledge, build community, and learn new skills. Rachel is pursuing a degree to help other individuals find their passion and develop their careers.

Kathy Kemnitz graduated from UW–Madison in May 2022 with a bachelor’s degree in social work, a few days after turning 52. School had always been challenging for her, and she remembers a chemistry lecture at Madison Area Technical College during which she realized she did not learn like the other students. She sought out testing for learning disabilities but it wasn’t available to her at the time. About the same time she discovered she was pregnant with her first son and left school. Eighteen years later, after a shift in employment left her at a crossroads, her oldest son encouraged her to go back to college. She started back at Madison College and then was accepted to UW–Madison. She finished her first semester with a 3.0 GPA despite feeling like she was still struggling with how to learn. Finally receiving an ADHD diagnosis, she was able to get the support she needed to finally thrive in school. She is working as a clinical support specialist at 5 Door Recovery while pursuing a master’s degree in social work.

After abandoning a traditional path in 2006 due to financial instability, lack of support, and mental illness, Signe Kilmer felt that an undergraduate degree was beyond her reach. In 2007, she returned to school, aspiring a career-focused education. She graduated from Madison Area Technical College with an associate degree in dental hygiene in 2011. After seven years in the field, Signe was successful but never genuinely happy with this career choice. Desiring to attain a bachelor’s degree, she applied to Badger Ready the first semester it was offered. She had several semesters of uncertainty and was unsure of what to major in, but it took belief in herself to live life on her own terms. In August 2023, Signe graduated with a bachelor’s degree in art history. Today she is following her passion and pursuing a career in the museum field, something Badger Ready and Bucky’s Tuition Promise enabled her to do.

Amber Kirkpatrick decided to stop putting her future on hold and pursue her first bachelor’s degree in nursing even though this would create a financial burden for her family. She wants to show her family, including two teenaged children, that pursuing higher education at any age is always beneficial. Hard work and dedication
will make the hardship worth it in the end and give them all the bright future they deserve.

Anna Knezic was born and raised in Milwaukee. She is the oldest of four siblings. Her parents, George and Martha, were high school sweethearts. Anna was close to her dad’s parents, her Oma from Germany and her Dedu from Serbia, when they were alive. Being the grandchild of immigrants is something she is fiercely proud of. Anna always wanted to go to medical school, but knew she wanted to do other things first. After traveling the world, living abroad, and having countless odd jobs, she is finally pursuing her dream of attending medical school. It might not be getting married to her high school sweetheart and having kids, but it is the path that allows her to follow her heart.

Autumn Kohler is a queer, disabled student studying marketing through UW–Madison Online. Originally from Wisconsin, she currently resides in Rochester, Minnesota, where she spends her days studying, reading, and advocating for the disability community. She is a proud proponent of disability justice and LGBTQIA+ rights.

As an aesthetician, Annie Lewis fell in love with the hands-on healing nature of the work. When the pandemic forced her to take a break, she realized it might be time to complete the bachelor’s degree she started right out of high school. At the time, health challenges prevented her from staying at UW Oshkosh. She then pivoted and worked for an international pharmacy chain where she quickly rose to corporate executive. She had found success but not happiness. That’s when she became an aesthetician, work that she still does today having started her own business in March 2022 while an undergraduate. Annie graduated from UW–Madison with a major in health promotion and health equity in May of 2023 and is currently working on a business plan to expand her solo practice into a wellness spa. She plans to focus on the overlap between her work as an aesthetician and her health education specialist training to provide wellness and self-care opportunities for all.

Anna (LaMonica) Lonergan has overcome difficult life circumstances to continue her second year in the doctor of nursing practice program. As a clinical research nurse, Anna is applying her knowledge and skills to contribute to the health field. Her awareness of privilege, cultivated through the population health program, has inspired a commitment to addressing health disparities and social inequities. Recognizing the potential impact of nursing in creating positive change, one way she hopes to influence public policy is to ensure access to healthy school meals for all children, particularly in schools on tribal lands. As a single parent to her four-year-old daughter, Anna is motivated by a desire to demonstrate the transformative impact of nursing on the well-being of underserved populations. With a mission to shape policies, her professional experience, academic knowledge, and personal values, Anna is positioning herself to be a positive force for change in the field of health care and public policy.
Qianna Loomis was a strong high school student, but left school after their first year of college due to mental health challenges. They then moved to Madison and obtained a license in therapeutic massage. After practicing massage for a couple of years, they felt a call to do more and contribute to something larger. Passionate about environmental issues and motivated to help others, Qianna decided to return to school with the goal of becoming a chemical engineer. Starting at Madison Area Technical College, they found strong support from advisors and peers (most of whom were also nontraditional students). Support from advisors at UW–Madison solidified the choice to transfer was the correct one. They were accepted into Community Environmental Scholars Program. Qianna credits support from Writing Center, UHS mental health services, advisors and professors willing to meet (no matter how many questions), and the “best dang study group someone could ask for.” They will study abroad this summer in Oviedo, Spain then begin a position as a chemical engineer at an environmental and engineering consulting company.

Lisette Lurker was born and grew up in Mexico City. In her early years, she chose computer engineering as a major and started to work in the tech sector. For socioeconomic reasons, she worked more than she attended college and gained experience in robotics. She participated in robotics events from 2007 to 2017 which gave her the opportunity to discover new cultures through international events. Discovering her vocation was research, she developed technical skills in this sector. At age 28, she moved to Madison to marry a UW–Madison student. She was challenged by a new language, culture, and lifestyle. In researching how she could return to school to pursue her goal of a college education, she learned about the Badger Ready program. While in the Badger Ready program, she faced two big challenges: becoming homeless due to unexpected life changes and becoming a widow with the implications of an early loss. For that reason, she was more involved in the Wisconsin community. She looked for help and received it. She plans to declare computer science as her major.

Christopher Malecki returned to his scholastic journey after a 13-year struggle with mental illness that was fueled by substance abuse. Returning to university has provided him with the tools and experiences to build a future that seemed so far from the realm of possibility when he first began his journey in 2016. After discovering a latent interest in mathematics and computer science, Christopher was able to parlay his passion for creative problem solving. He has been immensely grateful for the opportunity to help others in recovery navigate their transitions to community college. As he embarks on this new chapter at UW–Madison, Christopher is committed to balancing his responsibilities as a parent and sharing his inspiring story of recovery with others.

Dustin McKindsey is a dedicated father to two inspirations, Athena (9) and Colt (4). Athena’s interrogative wonder propels him into unexplored realms, while Colt’s fervor for life renews his commitment to
embracing every challenge. Dustin aspires to take their inspiration and show them, that with hard work and a few failures along the way, one can make a dream come true.

**Brigitte Mellot** started the Badger Ready program in the fall of 2021. She successfully completed the program requirements this past December and was admitted as a transfer student. Now, as an undergraduate student, she is pursuing a bachelor’s degree majoring in atmospheric and oceanic sciences. Fueled with dedication and drive, Brigitte looks forward to what the future holds.

At age 41, **Amy Moreland** has taken a bold step back into the classroom after her job was affected by the pandemic. As the first in her family to attend college, she is breaking new ground and currently majoring in legal studies. Her hard work has landed Amy on the honor roll, a milestone that marks her academic dedication.

**Agnes Moreno** is a mom and a military spouse. As her family transitioned into civilian life, she decided to go back to school. Her family settled for good in Wisconsin. She worked hard to get back in school, and despite challenges as a returning adult in a pool of younger students, she decided to pursue pharmacy school. While doing her pre-pharmacy coursework, she worked as a part-time pharmacy technician, a full-time student, and a full-time mom. She chose to attend UW–Madison School of Pharmacy because it is one of the top pharmacy schools in the nation—and it is the best decision she made. Her goal when she graduates is to give back to those who served in the military and help the underserved as a community pharmacist.

**Skye Moss** is a driven and ambitious individual who has achieved remarkable success in her career. With her strong work ethic and determination, she has surpassed all expectations given the adversity she faced. Her accomplishments serve as a testament to her unwavering dedication and ability to overcome challenges. She continues to inspire others with her incredible achievements.

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 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 currently in her junior year of completing her chemical engineering major.

**Sarah O’Donnell** is a 46-year-old mother of three amazing children who are each successful in their educational goals. She began as a massage therapist in 2003 and continued this work through receiving a bachelor’s degree at UW Oshkosh. With that degree, she obtained a career as a child protective services case manager in child
that degree, she obtained a career as a child protective services case manager in child welfare and has been in her role since 2018. During her time in this field, Sarah realized the system gaps and problematic policies that exist are not recognized by everyone. She decided another level of education was one solution to understanding how to effect change in systems.

Alice Owiti is originally from Kenya and recently became a U.S. citizen. She resides in Madison and has two sons who are currently in Kenya. She majored in biology and recently was accepted to the accelerated bachelor of science in nursing program. Alice works 90 to 100 hours per week as a caregiver to provide for herself and her family back in Kenya. Also, Alice is a lover of education and always happy to donate some of her time to assist those who are struggling in chemistry. She loves to take care of other people and that’s why she is working as a caregiver.

As the sole parent of two sons, Rebecca Parmentier was caught in a cycle of poverty and generational trauma. She realized her only way out was to further her education. As she strove for the confidence and growth that come with academic achievement, she was a role model for her sons who became successful students and set their own goals higher with new possibilities for their lives. Rebecca’s college journey began in 1990 as a dance major, but she left school in 1994. After taking community courses and earning her massage license and biodynamic craniosacral therapy specialization, she came back to UW–Madison in fall 2015, intent on earning an undergraduate degree. In that time she suffered injuries from multiple car accidents but still persists towards her goals. Rebecca will graduate this year with majors in psychology, theatre and drama, and a dance therapy certificate. She plans to work in the field of healthcare research and become a healing source for others.

Ashley Guadalupe Portillo Recinos is the eldest of four children born to working class immigrant Guatemalan parents. Born and raised in Los Angeles, Ashley has witnessed and experienced many of the obstacles that minority communities encounter when pursuing higher education and seeking health care. Because of such experiences, she hopes to one day address these barriers by serving as a bridge between quality health care and low income communities. Ashley also hopes to serve as a mentor and help other students who have experienced similar struggles as they pursue higher education.

Mary Pulchinski is a single mother of three, with a deep passion for public health. She has experienced and overcome a number of barriers in her life to get to this point, and she is so proud of what she has accomplished. Her goal is to work to improve and build the public health system in the state of Wisconsin, to help residents achieve their best lives.

Joseph Rausch was born in Ethiopia and welcomed into his adoptive family over two decades ago. They have been his support system, but love was not enough to protect him from negative experiences he
encountered growing up as one of few Black people in a nearly all-white city. His strong desire to address the unique challenges faced by his community led him to become co-founder and president of the Madison Black Nurses Association. He completed his RN associate degree at Madison Area Technical College, where he mentored other Black nursing students. There he was nominated by instructors to serve on the student panel at the 2021 Wisconsin Leadership Summit, and at UW–Madison he was selected to attend the 2024 American Association of Colleges of Nursing Student Summit in Washington D.C. He currently works full-time as an RN at UW Health and is in UW–Madison’s BSN@Home program. Joseph balances his personal and professional commitments with his amateur career as a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu athlete.

Although statistically not many foster children move toward higher education, Amanda Sauri stayed dedicated toward her vision of completing college. UW–Madison accepted the return of Amanda with a warm embrace, which pushed her toward further growth as a student, parent, and an individual in recovery. With a new found passion of business and motherhood, she’s looking forward to completing her long-standing goal in education and using that to provide a better life for her small family.

Qinghua Shang was born in the mid-1970s. She completed an associate degree in computer science in the mid-1990s and began working. Her journey in the U.S. started when she was 29. Her first attempt at obtaining a degree was interrupted by childbirth. Qinghua is a devoted mother who dedicated 15 years of her life to caring for her children and family. It was a joyful and fulfilling time for her. Throughout these years she held various jobs. Her longest tenure, spanning 16 years, was as a Chinese teacher. However, she always harbored ambitions in her heart. Now, she is embarking on her third attempt to earn a degree. She is thrilled about this opportunity and is determined to excel.

Since giving birth to her son in 2018, Ashley Spink completed a bachelor’s degree in health information management at UW–Green Bay, a medical coder technical diploma from Mid-State Technical College, passed her certified coding associate credentialing exam, and is currently working toward a master’s degree within the Clinical Health Informatics program at UW–Madison. She is currently working for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Milwaukee Regional Office as a veterans service representative and volunteering for the Badger Honor Flight and Wreaths Across America. Ashley credits her son, who has been by her side since the beginning, as he is the reason for her dedication and perseverance. Forward has no finish line—this is just the beginning.

James Spoden had a good career in U.S. trade compliance but during the pandemic reexamined his future and impact on the world. His wife encouraged him to return to school. Starting at Madison Area Technical College, he earned an associate
degree in 2022 and transferred to UW–Madison that same summer, majoring in environmental science and life science communications. At times, he was filled with doubt about his decision, feeling out of place and not wanting to draw attention to himself as the only adult student in class. But he fell in love with his first remote sensing course and was encouraged by his advisors, instructors, and peers to specialize in geospatial science. He hasn’t looked back and has thrived as a student. Jim and his wife live in Madison, and he hopes to pursue graduate studies someday.

In her final career chapter, Shannon Kelly Stege returned to her alma mater to pursue a graduate degree. Much has changed in the past three-plus decades since she received a bachelor’s degree in dairy science and bacteriology. One constant is the high-quality in-person instruction and energizing connections with diverse classmates. These make the long commute from Hartford worthwhile. After homeschooling her three children, Shannon took a job as a special educational assistant. Inspired by this experience, she is completing a master’s degree in special education with certification. Shannon plans to return to rural Dodge County as an elementary school special education teacher.

Sartu Taha is currently a second-year medical student at UW–Madison’s School of Medicine and Public Health. She grew up in Saint Paul, Minnesota and attended Wellesley College, where she majored in biology and Spanish. Sartu is interested in community and global health. She hopes to work with immigrant communities in the U.S. as well as taking part in global health efforts around the world.

Bao Vang is a first year didactic student in the physician assistant program who, despite a torturous path, has finally begun her journey as an aspiring physician assistant. She went to UW–Green Bay, Manitowoc Campus (formerly UW–Manitowoc) and transferred to UW–Madison where she completed a bachelor’s degree in biology.

Hezouwe Walada was seven when he made the decision to become a physician. At the time, he was living in Togo and his village was experiencing a malaria epidemic. He attended a highly selective school 15 miles from his home, walking there and back each day. Despite being chosen to attend medical school in his home country, he won the Togo lottery for a U.S. visa and set out for Madison, knowing UW–Madison was a top medical school. He was 17 when he arrived here, speaking no English and with no money. Thanks to ESL classes at Madison Area Technical College, a jumpstart through the Odyssey Project, the Badger Ready pathway, and his own perseverance, Hezouwe graduated in Spring 2023 with a bachelor’s degree in biochemistry and a global health certificate. He is preparing to apply to medical school this June and will start a master’s degree in public health at UW–Madison’s School of Medicine and Public Health this fall.

Parker Wall is a fiction writer from New Orleans. Drawing on his experiences as a
trauma survivor, Parker studies counseling psychology and world religions to explore questions of morality, grief, and recovery. He believes that the answer for most issues can be found in a secret journal and a good night’s sleep.

When Jaime Wendt left school, it was always her intention to return, but as she settled into her banking career she felt less inclined to do so. Then she hit a ceiling at work which caused her to lose sight of her future and she struggled. A calling to serve as a lay minister in her faith community inspired her to continue her education but she was concerned her past grades would be an obstacle. Enter the Badger Ready program which gave Jaime a pathway to admission as a transfer student at UW–Madison. Despite maintaining her job in banking, albeit fewer hours, she has been quite successful in her courses. In addition to school and work, she accepted positions as a senior interfaith fellow at the Center for Religion and Global Citizenry and as a federal judicial intern with U.S. Probation and Pre-Trial Services. After graduating, she accepted a position at the Department of Workforce Development. She looks forward to serving her community in a public service career.

Claire Wieboldt is a returning adult student and a Madison native. She began college as a traditional student pursuing a bachelor’s degree in computer science, but life derailed her original plans. With a newfound passion for public libraries, after working in the field and observing all they do for communities, she is thrilled to continue her education at UW–Madison.

While she is still interested in computer science, she is also considering studying information science since it is closely aligned with library work. After graduation, she hopes to continue serving the community by working in information technology within the nonprofit or health care sector or to stay in the library field as a systems librarian. She is excited for the road ahead.

Hollie Wierschke spent one year as a film student at UW–Milwaukee but did not find it fulfilling. Over the next eight years, she worked a variety of jobs, most recently as a paralegal. A burgeoning interest in psychological literature fostered a curiosity about the biological mechanisms that underpin mental processes, which led to her desire to return to school. She initially felt a stark difference between herself and her younger peers which felt isolating but also provided a unique perspective that she has come to value. As a neuroscience major, she wants to understand the connection between inflammatory processes and mental health disorders. She has participated in experiments which led to her developing a paper as first author. Hollie has found support through Bucky’s Tuition Promise, the Writing Center, and many research faculty. She will begin doctoral studies in fall 2024.

After a 20-year break from school, Rebekah Wilce was able to begin the master of library and information studies program at UW–Madison in the fall of 2023. She has been an adult services librarian at public libraries in Arizona since 2021 and plans to continue, expanding her
work in public or academic libraries before and after graduation. Bekah’s goal is to provide exemplary reference and information service and to operate excellent public and academic libraries that are open and accessible to all, at a time when they are needed more than ever. She believes that providing these services is crucial social justice work that can undermine and undo systemic injustice and help to build better, more just systems.

**Arabela Wiley** is a single mother in her senior year of college. Due to the precariousness of life, many events ranging from illness to childbirth have prevented her from taking a linear pathway through college. Despite a multitude of educational interruptions, she is nearing the end of her undergraduate year. Trying to balance work, school, and being a full-time single mom has ultimately led to the need for financial assistance. College itself is an expensive endeavor and adding the cost of raising a child has made paying for all necessities difficult. Educational financial assistance will greatly help her complete a degree as well as ensuring her son can be provided with everything he needs.

Over the past 20 years, **Julie Winkelmann** worked to return to UW–Madison as a graduate nursing student. She has worked to improve maternal child health in Dane County but felt that the voice of nursing was missing in public health. She felt stuck between direct care nursing, where clinicians focused on individual choices, and public health that addressed large systems, missing the voice of individuals. Through her experience with challenges in health care, mental health, child protection, and the justice system, Julie recognized that individual and community voice are critical to system change in public health. In 2023 Julie returned to UW–Madison to pursue a doctor of nursing practice to address system change through the lens of individual and community voice.

**Alexandra Yokomizo** is a Las Vegas native and currently works at Touro University Nevada in Henderson as the research laboratory technician. She has 15 years of experience in health care and spent the majority of her health care career working in sleep medicine. Alexandra made the transition to biomedical research after obtaining a bachelor’s degree in biology from Nevada State University and works with professors at Touro on groundbreaking research projects and as a mentor to medical students. She is also in the process of obtaining a master’s degree in psychoactive pharmaceutical investigation from UW–Madison where she hopes to join in on exciting projects to help advance the field of psychoactive research.

**Zalissa Zongo Kafando** is a mother of three children and a first-generation undergraduate student who returned to college after over ten years away. She was born and raised in Burkina Faso, a West African country. She moved to the U.S. due to political instabilities and insecurities to find a better life opportunity. Maintaining strong academic skills, she intends to graduate with a major in computer science by fall 2024. She plans to work as a software/data engineer. Zalissa also works...
as a caregiver with Senior Helpers Madison, while going to school full-time and taking care of her family. She has a passion for computers, software management, and problem solving, and is determined to succeed, most importantly, to be a role model for her children.

**Gabriela Zumwalt** grew up in La Paz, Bolivia. She moved to the U.S. in 2014 at age 19. After spending a few semesters learning English at Madison Area Technical College, she embarked on her college journey. While working full-time as a server, she graduated from Madison College with an associate degree in human services. Not long after, her interest in psychology drove her to apply to UW–Madison. Attending a prestigious school like UW–Madison was just one of her wildest dreams; as a first-generation immigrant and student, she thought college was not something she was meant to do. However, with the support of her loving husband and family members cheering her on from Bolivia, she is now a year away from obtaining a bachelor’s degree in psychology.
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 will provide 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 and 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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