



School of Nursing
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

BSN Graduation Celebration

Saturday, May 9, 2026

Shannon Hall, Memorial Union

CLASS OF 2026

SIGNIFICANCE OF ACADEMIC REGALIA

CAP & GOWN

Candidates for the bachelor's degree wear a black mortarboard cap with a tassel of their course color, apricot for nursing. The bachelor's gown, symbolizing the first degree in the three principal levels of academic achievement, is made of black material with a closed front and sleeves that are long, pointed, and open.

HOOD

The bachelor's hood is worn by those who previously received a baccalaureate degree. The hood is short with a narrow velvet edging in the color of the discipline, apricot for nursing, and a lining in the color of the institution, cardinal red at UW-Madison.

STOLES

Graduation stoles are worn to signify academic achievement, honors, membership, and identity. Nursing specific stoles include a white stole with three cardinal red bars, indicating graduation from the Nursing Honors Program, and a gold stole, representing graduation within the top 20% of a cohort, known as Excellence in Nursing Education.

CORDS

Graduation cords are worn to signify achievements, memberships, and leadership roles. Nursing specific cords represented this year include ABSN Cohort (*gold*), Black Student Nursing Association (*brown*), Multicultural Student Nurse Organization (*pink*), Nursing Knowledge Network Leader (*red, gold, & white twist*), Sigma Honors Society (*purple & white twist*), Student Nurses Association (*red*), Student Ambassador (*red & white twist*), Student Council Member (*blue, green, & orange twist*), and Volunteer Service (*silver*).

Dean Emerit Linda D. Scott
PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FADLN, FNAP, FAAN

Dean Emerit Scott transformed the School of Nursing through visionary leadership, a steadfast commitment to health equity, advocacy, and an unwavering dedication to preparing nurses to transform the future of care. Her work elevated the School's academic reputation, strengthened its research enterprise, and expanded opportunities for students, faculty, and staff alike.

nursing.wisc.edu/remembering-linda-d-scott



In Memoriam

Welcome

Susan J. Zahner, DrPH, RN, FNAP, FAAN

Interim Dean and Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor

Greetings from the Faculty

Dana O'Brien, PhD, MHA, RN, CNE

Clinical Professor, Undergraduate Program Director

Remarks to the Graduates

Caleb Anderson

Accelerated BSN Program

Grace Weber

RN-to-BSN Program

Brandon Kreger

Traditional BSN Program

Presentation of Awards & Recognitions

Carolyn Chi Nguyen

Badger Future Nurse Leader Award

Kirsten Olson

DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nursing Students

Isabel Prohaska

DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nursing Students

Cindy Dionysius, MSN, RN

DAISY Award for Nursing Educators in an Academic Setting

Leah Schultz, RN-BC

DAISY Award for Nursing Educators in a Clinical Setting

Julia Zellmer

School of Nursing Flag Bearer

Peter Felt

School of Nursing Outstanding Undergraduate Student Award

Amy Jochsett Perez, BSN'21, RN

Outstanding Badger Nurse Alumni Award

Recognition of Pin Recipients

Recognition of Involvement

Announcement of Graduates

Dana O'Brien, PhD, MHA, RN, CNE

Clinical Professor, Undergraduate Program Director

Rebecca J. Muehrer, PhD, RN

Clinical Professor, Accelerated BSN Coordinator

Closing Remarks

Susan J. Zahner, DrPH, RN, FNAP, FAAN

Interim Dean and Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor

Live-captioning of the
event can be accessed at
tinyurl.com/bsnCART



Bachelor of Science–Nursing Graduates

Jakyrá Amomy Abraham^T
Madeline Evelyn Adams^T
Amivi Clarisse Agbo^T
Caleb Anderson^{A•}
Mariana Antonio Serrano^T
Morgan Lily Arneman^{T•}
Anna Arthur^{T•}
Jisu Bae^A
Itzel Bahena Medina^T
Ellie Barta^A
Ellery Bartels^{T•◊}
Kaylee Grace Bauman^T
Kate Beckel^{A•}
Emma Bednar^{T•}
Drew W. Benish^T
Amaliya K. Benjamin^{T•}
Phurbu Bhuti^T
Kristin A. Blackwood^B
Brenda Bompan Benadiba^A
Jocelyn Marie Botz^A
Megan A. Boulton^T
Peyton Bradbury^T
Leah Marie Breen^T
Taylor Elizabeth C Brook^T
Callie Brouette^A
Rebecca Julianne Burkhalter^T
Danielle Bussell^A
Abigail Callaway^B
Jada S. Callaway^T
Lauren Mia Calvetti^T
Kiersten A. Cassidy^{A•}
Natalia Cavazos–Ventura^T
Josephina Cefalu^{T◊}
Morgan Chatterton^{B•}
Megan Elizabeth Christens^T
Melissa Lynn Clark^{A•}
Elliott Clements^A
Hailey Coburn^A
Margaret Helen Cole^A
Emma Cook^{T•}
Jadyn Carissa Currie^T
Juan Sebastian Daza Mejia^T
Carmela T. De Leon^{T◊}
Macy Kay Deaton^T

Kamryn Elena Dembny^{T•}
Sadie DeVries^T
Chloe Diamond^{T◊}
Amanda Dolby^T
McKenna Domach^T
Jenna Lynn Dorshorst^{T•}
Grant Dowling^A
Olivia Dreas^A
Ashley Elizabeth Durnen^T
Emily Eaton^A
Sutten Ebben^T
Anika Eder^T
Emma M. Egbert^A
Emily Linh Einerson^A
Martins Enegide^A
Celia Esbensen^T
Peter John Zumerchik Felt^{A•}
Ava Fischer^T
Brenna Clare Fischer^{A•}
Olivia Fitch^T
Katie Forseth^A
Sadie Yvonne Fox^{A•}
Emma Franklin^T
Isaiah Wayne Frazier^T
Chase Alexander Fritz^T
Emma Frommelt^{T•}
Estefany Guadalupe Gamon–Garcia^T
Morgan Gander^T
Grace Garthwait^T
Andrea Gligorevic^A
Daunte William Gordon^T
Sonny R. Graves^T
Emily Jo Griesbach^A
Emma Guerena^T
Taylor Ann Marie Guido^{T◊}
Reuben Guzik^T
Logan Hall^T
Olivia Hally^{T◊}
Alexandra Angulo^T
Margaret Harvey^{T•}
Bishara Abdisalam Hassan^T
Amber Margaret Hassinger^B
JoJo Heimerl^T
Austin Hensley^A

Maritza Hernandez Gamon^T
Elise Kay Hetchler^T
William Holden^B
Lisa Howser^{A•}
Alice Hu^{T•}
Cassidy Hughes^T
Lydia Claire Jacob^T
Alexandra Jacobs^T
Aminata Jammeh^A
Jordyn Grace Jarvi^{T•}
Amelia Irene Jensen^A
Elizabeth Mary Jewell^T
Ethan Johnson^T
Madison Ashlee Johnson^{T◊}
Emma K. Judd^{T•◊}
Alexia Lynn Kaiser^A
Kaelyn Kessel^B
Amrita Khaira^A
Alina Kiepert^T
Max King^A
Ava Kittelson^T
Molly Jane Fry Klipfel^A
Maya Korol^A
Brandon Kreger^{T◊}
Anna Grace La Violette^{T•}
Ethan Joshua Labriel^T
Lauren Ladwig^B
Carolyn Lang^T
Tressa Marie Langenohl^T
Stephanie Nhi Le^T
Amaya Ledezma–Williams^T
Carly Lehman^T
Liv Plum Lekovish^T
Jared Lemminger^{T◊}
Lauren LePine^T
Chesney Leslie^T
Hannah Rose Liddle^{T•}
Ross Lindsey^T
Brynn Lipske^{T•}
Venice Loar^A
Delaney Lokken^T
Emeline Lopez^{A•}
Hope Lowney^T
Jesse Luu^A

Kylie Madden ^B
 Sophia Makarewycz ^T
 Sophia Antoinette Mandella ^T
 Sahana Rengarajan Manipala ^T
 Luke Tigrane Mardinian ^A
 Hailey Rose Markee ^{A•}
 Caroline Marshall ^T
 Margo McGinty ^A
 Katherine Melms ^{T•}
 Morgan Merckx ^T
 Alissa Marie Mickol ^A
 William Lloyd Mihalovic ^{T◊}
 Jade Millar-Sheikh ^T
 Lauryn S. Milne ^{A•}
 Jessica Mitchell ^A
 Emily Moe ^A
 Ruth Loretta Mongoven ^{T•◊}
 Olivia Moore ^{T•◊}
 Annie Naczek ^B
 Aidan Neitzel ^A
 Shawna Leeann Nelson ^B
 Carolyn Chi Nguyen ^{T◊}
 Ashley Ocampo Reyes ^T
 Shannon E. O'Leary ^T
 Jordan Olson ^A
 Kirsten Alana Olson ^A
 Dejanira Ortiz Hernandez ^T
 Sara Kay Ott ^T
 Alice Owiti ^A
 Alaina L. Palomaki ^T
 Madison V. Phon ^{T•}
 Elizabeth Grace Pleva ^{T•}
 Laura Nathalie Porter ^{T•}
 Isabel Maren Prohaska ^T
 Elise Pyatskowitz ^T
 Brittany Raab ^{A•}
 Sierra Rainey ^{A•}

Lindsey Reding ^A
 Brandy Reinert ^T
 Olivia Marie Reska ^{T◊}
 Kimberly Rierson ^{T•}
 Madison Kaelie Roerdink ^T
 Mia Rogers ^{A•}
 Shayna Rosenthal ^T
 Brayde Heather Sahl ^T
 Brianne Sauer ^T
 Brooklinn Sayre ^T
 Emma R. Schaefer ^{TΣ}
 Payton W. Schellin ^T
 Lily Belle Schellpfeffer ^T
 Nicole Grace Schmitt ^{TΣ}
 Gwen Schroeder ^T
 Karli Marie Schulenberg ^{B•}
 Emily Schulte ^{T•}
 Audrey Ann Selden ^T
 Summer Rae Shaw ^{T•}
 Jennifer M. Shortreed ^B
 Caroline Sigle ^A
 Anaya Simcakoski ^T
 Joseph Slavinsky ^T
 Hayley Emma Slohn ^T
 McKenna Smith ^T
 Jennah Soneson ^T
 Kari Sowieja ^B
 Miller Stang ^T
 Jillian Staven ^A
 Marion Sterk-Ciresi ^{T◊}
 Fiona Sternbach ^{T•}
 Abigail Stultz ^{T•}
 Kylie Faith Sweeny ^A
 Catherine Lucy Swietlik ^A
 Mia Sylvester ^T
 Yafet Araya Tadesse ^T
 Morgan Le Tews ^A

Kenny Thao ^T
 Kalea Thompson ^T
 Lila Hart Thompson ^T
 Adam Titi ^T
 Emma Pearl Trahms ^T
 Madeline Grace Trella ^{T•◊}
 Vivian Truong ^{T•}
 Juria Tsutsui ^A
 Emmersyn Lee Urbaniak ^T
 Abigail Tracy Utter ^T
 Avianna VanHooreweghe ^T
 Theodore H. Voth III ^T
 Kaija A. Wallin ^A
 Emily Walner ^{T◊}
 Joseph Walters ^T
 Grace Weber ^B
 Ethan Weinstein ^{T◊}
 Jenna Kerin Wendricks ^T
 Antoine Westbrook II ^T
 Tyler Westover ^T
 Jocelyn Rose Whiting ^T
 John Wiehl ^{T•}
 Emily Wierzchowski ^T
 Tatum Donna Fay Williams ^T
 Kylie Wilson ^A
 Leah Rose Wolfe ^T
 Shania Woods ^T
 Libbie Wroblewski ^{B•}
 Vanessa Wyatt ^A
 Houachi Xiong ^A
 Angeline Yang ^T
 J.D. Yantz ^T
 Jane Yoo ^T
 Allie A. Young ^{T◊Σ}
 Jasmine Zarate ^T
 Julia Zellmer ^A
 Zara Zellmer ^T

A - Accelerated BSN (ABSN) Program

B - RN-to-BSN (BSN@Home) Program

T - Traditional BSN (TBSN) Program

● - Graduating with Excellence in Nursing Education

◊ - Graduating from the School of Nursing Honors Program

Σ - Member of Sigma Theta Tau, International Honor Society of Nursing

2026 Graduation Speakers & Award Recipients

ABSN Graduation Speaker

Caleb Anderson



Caleb Anderson's peers see him as a natural leader in the accelerated BSN (ABSN) program, bringing energy, connection, and genuine positivity into every room he enters. Anderson's classmates consistently describe him as the person who unites the cohort, celebrates their successes, and motivates them through challenge-filled days. One nominator shared, "Caleb was one of the first students I met in this program... His energy and ability to relate to others make him an engaging presenter and speaker." Another added, "Caleb is a very outgoing person and is friends with everyone in the ABSN program... he has great energy that inspires everyone."

Anderson's leadership has extended beyond the classroom. As the Student Nurses' Association president, he helped students feel included and involved, encouraging participation in community events and fostering a sense of belonging. A fellow student noted, "Caleb inspired the ABSN cohort to get together outside of class and rely on each other during stressful times. He always tries to include everyone and motivates the people around him to do their best work." Whether organizing activities or offering encouragement to classmates facing difficult moments, Anderson has consistently shown what it means to lead with kindness and conviction.

"One year ago, I could not have imagined that my life would be filled with so much excitement, joy, friendship, fun, and love," Anderson said. "In my speech, I want to reflect on the good times, acknowledge how we handled the challenges with humor and grace, and look to the future with positivity and hope."

Through enthusiasm, sincerity, and unwavering support for his peers, Anderson has become a voice for his class and a fitting choice to represent them at graduation.

BSN@Home Graduation Speaker

Grace Weber, RN



Grace Weber has always known that she wanted to be a nurse. "It truly feels like my calling," she said. Growing up, her mother's nursing career inspired her, her ability to care for others, and the wide range of opportunities in the profession.

But like many meaningful journeys, Weber's wasn't linear. At eighteen she began college at UW-Madison, unsure of her direction. After navigating several twists and turns, including a move to Milwaukee, she found herself enrolling in nursing classes at a local technical college where she found clarity and fully embraced her calling.

In 2020, Weber left her job as a waitress to enter the healthcare field as a certified nursing assistant at Froedtert Hospital where she discovered the fulfillment of patient care. She worked weekends while attending Milwaukee Area Technical College for her Associate's Degree in Nursing, graduating with honors in 2022. Weber then became a nurse extern in the same unit where she now practices as a registered nurse, returning to the floor with increased confidence in her role.

Completing her bachelor's degree has long been a personal milestone, and representing the RN-to-BSN (BSN@Home) program as Graduation Speaker fills her with pride. For Weber, this moment is a celebration of perseverance, growth, and the community that supported her along the way.

She carries her late sister, Katherine, in her heart through it all. "She believed in me long before I believed in myself," Weber says. "I carry her with me in everything I do."

TBSN Graduation Speaker

Brandon Kreger



From the earliest days of the traditional BSN (TBSN) program, Brandon Kreger established himself as a strong, encouraging advocate for his cohort—someone who spoke up, shared resources, and helped classmates feel at ease in a new environment. Nominators describe him as a student who elevates the learning experience for everyone around him. One classmate wrote, “Brandon has always been a huge voice for our cohort, consistently sharing ideas and outside resources with the entire class.” Another added, “Brandon has been a phenomenal representation of the professionalism and dedication required from a Badger nurse,” noting in particular the dedication he brought to his role as Student Ambassador.

Kreger’s classmates highlight his passion for learning and for helping others learn. Whether offering insights from recent research, answering questions during lectures, or presenting on diabetes with clarity and enthusiasm, he is known for making complex topics feel engaging and accessible. “Brandon’s participation in class and dedication to making us better nurses for our future patients with diabetes is very admirable,” one nominator shared.

In his speech, Kreger will reflect on shared challenges, acknowledge the importance of leaning on classmates, and recognize key faculty. “Nursing school was a difficult time but we made it through,” Kreger said. “We are all going to be amazing nurses!”

With warmth, authenticity, and a genuine love for the profession, Kreger stands ready to celebrate his class and to honor the community that helped shape their journey.

Badger Future Nurse Leader Award

Carolyn Chi Nguyen



Carolyn Nguyen exemplifies leadership through her commitment to advocacy and her focus on building connection, belonging, and confidence in others. Through her experience as a mentor, peer navigator, and community volunteer, Nguyen has built a reputation for lifting others up and helping them feel supported and seen in spaces that can feel overwhelming. One nominator shared, “When I was still a pre-nursing student, Carolyn was my mentor. She was always so encouraging throughout my journey and constantly helped instill confidence in me.” Even now, that student says Nguyen continues to offer “a safe space to calm down and regroup.”

Nguyen’s leadership extends across the UW–Madison community where she has been actively involved in a range of organizations. As a long-term Lead Peer Navigator with the Center for Educational Opportunity, she supported first-generation and underrepresented students through academic challenges, campus transitions, and self-doubt. One nominator highlighted Nguyen’s ability, as a first-generation student herself, to make others feel they belong: “She leads with empathy, follows through with action, and makes people feel capable of more than they thought they were.”

When Nguyen was selected to present at the National Conference on Race & Ethnicity, the experience strengthened her commitment to amplifying underrepresented voices. Her session on the experiences of BIPOC individuals with diverse abilities created space for attendees to share personal stories—some through tears. For Nguyen, those moments reflected the impact she hoped to have: helping people feel safe, heard, and validated.

Her commitment to service is equally evident. Nguyen has volunteered with Babies and Beyond, MLK Day of Service, Second Harvest Food Pantry, and has participated in a global health clinical experience in Malawi. Nguyen’s experiences have shaped her vision for the future, with career aspirations in pediatrics, oncology, and mental health, guided by her passions for advocacy, culturally responsive care, and health equity. Nguyen’s story is one of steady, people-centered leadership rooted in empathy, strengthened through adversity, and shared generously with those around her.

DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nursing Students

Kirsten Olson



From the earliest days of the ABSN program, Kirsten Olson has demonstrated a depth of compassion and resilience that has moved her peers, instructors, and patients alike. Olson's path through the ABSN program at UW–Madison has been shaped by extraordinary challenges, yet also by extraordinary strength.

Olson's mother passed away just one month into the ABSN program, less than six weeks after being diagnosed with an aggressive brain cancer. Between trips home to California and moments of overwhelming grief, Olson chose to continue her studies, walking into her clinical placement two days after her mother's passing, grounded by her commitment to care for others.

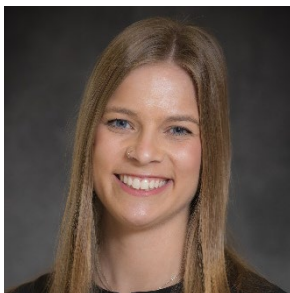
As she worked with older adults during her skilled nursing rotation, she heard stories of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, reminding her of all the moments her own mother would never experience. Despite this heartbreak, she approached every patient and family member with intention, presence, and compassion.

Her clinical experiences have deepened her calling. Her own grief fresh in mind, Olson has the ability to connect with patients experiencing profound bereavement. One patient, a veteran, confided that he had a broken heart after losing his wife of over sixty years. By sitting with him, listening, and empathizing, Olson was able to provide emotional support and comfort. Olson says, "I now know that providing comfort by intertwining the strength of professional skill with the peace of sincere compassion can greatly soften suffering during unimaginable times."

Olson's journey is one of courage, empathy, and unwavering purpose. Her ability to transform personal loss into healing for others makes her a deeply deserving recipient of the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nursing Students.

DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nursing Students

Isabel Prohaska



Isabel Prohaska embodies the compassion, advocacy, and presence that define extraordinary nursing. One of her nominators wrote, "Isabel has been the single most caring and motivated student I have ever met... It is the type of care that all of us aspire to give to our patients, that she demonstrates every day." Another added, "I am inspired by Isabel's strong advocacy for her patients... Isabel already embodies the kind of nurse who changes lives through empathy, courage, and unwavering commitment to her patients."

Prohaska's dedication is rooted in her work as a doula for Harambee Village, a collective of community-based doulas, educated and supported by Black voices. Supporting more than forty families through labor and birth, she has provided care marked by trust and fierce advocacy, often being the first call when contractions begin and sometimes providing the only support a birthing person has. Her experiences extend globally; during clinical work in Malawi, she comforted families through both celebration and profound loss, showing the strength of presence in its most human form.

Her passion for labor and delivery nursing began in childhood, shaped by her parents' traumatic experience with the preterm birth of her and her twin sister, and her mom's development of eclampsia. "My parents' eyes still get misty when telling our birth story," says Prohaska. "During her labor, they felt uninformed, scared, and untrusting of their medical team. I knew I wanted to support other families through uncertainty." This story still guides her. As Prohaska explains, "Doula care has taught me the core lesson of nursing: presence. Showing up for the intensity of labor, guiding families through medical decisions, and remaining beside them during loss, fully present until they feel seen, supported, and empowered."

Whether translating complex medical information, supporting teen parents, navigating moments of crisis, or teaching peers about childbirth, Prohaska leads with empathy and clinical excellence. Her dream of becoming a nurse-midwife has been years in the making and every step she has taken affirms that she is already the kind of nurse who changes lives.

DAISY Award for Nursing Educators in an Academic Setting

Cindy Dionysius, MSN, RN



Cindy Dionysius is celebrated by her students as an instructor who embodies the very best of nursing—compassion, clarity, patience, and an unwavering commitment to helping future nurses grow with confidence. Her students describe her as the kind of educator who changes the trajectory of a nursing education, not through grand gestures, but through consistent, intentional acts of support. As one nominator shared, she “genuinely cares about her students and their growth,” creating a learning environment where they feel “comfortable and confident.”

Across skills labs and clinical rotations, Dionysius is known for her thoughtful teaching style.

“Every lesson, every post-clinical debrief and action she did always felt so intentional for the betterment of our education and future as nurses,” wrote one student. Another noted that she “consistently demonstrated kindness, respect, and strong leadership,” developing a clinical environment where students could ask questions openly and grow strong clinical skills while strengthening their ability to provide humanistic care.

Students emphasized her patience and willingness to go above and beyond, slowing down when needed, advocating for diverse clinical experiences, and offering time to ensure concepts truly clicked. Many described her as a role model whose empathy and resilience shaped not only their clinical abilities but their understanding of what it means to be a nurse.

Reflecting on the recognition, Dionysius shared, “I am truly grateful for this honor, which reflects the incredible dedication and compassion of the students I am so fortunate to teach. To be recognized by the future nurses I mentor is the most rewarding part of my career, and it inspires me to continue fostering a supportive environment where they can grow into excellent, patient-centered providers.”

DAISY Award for Nursing Educators in a Clinical Setting

Leah Schultz, RN-BC



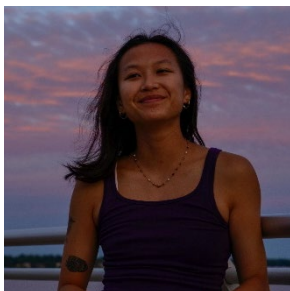
Leah Schultz is the kind of preceptor whose influence stays with students long after their clinical rotation ends. As a charge nurse on the Inpatient Psychiatric unit at St. Mary’s Hospital in Madison, Schultz is known for her steady presence, deep compassion, and remarkable ability to make patients feel safe while guiding them toward healing. One nominator described her as “an absolutely phenomenal clinical preceptor,” noting her skill in asking the right questions, building trust, and managing expectations with both firmness and empathy.

Her leadership extends beyond patient care. As charge nurse, Schultz “leads the unit with grace,” coordinating seamlessly with the interdisciplinary team, outside hospitals, and community mental health organizations. Students emphasize how thoroughly she knows her patients and how closely she collaborates with her team to ensure safe, thoughtful discharge planning. Her preceptees leave with a rich understanding of psychiatric nursing, legal considerations in mental health care, crisis collaboration, and the importance of strong therapeutic relationships. “I feel exceptionally prepared to support patients emotionally because of Leah’s guidance. Her kind leadership and feedback were invaluable,” one of her preceptees wrote. “Leah is one of the most deserving nurses I have ever met for consideration for a DAISY award.”

Schultz’s own journey into precepting is rooted in gratitude. She recalls her first days as a new nurse, overwhelmed and unsure, until a preceptor welcomed her “with warmth, calm, and a completely nonjudgmental presence.” That experience shaped her philosophy: “As a board-certified psychiatric nurse, passing on my knowledge feels especially important. Mental health affects every patient we care for, regardless of the department. I strive to teach students the importance of rapport building, empathy, active listening, communication, and de-escalation—skills that build confidence and strengthen patient care in any setting.” For Schultz, watching students grow in their confidence and abilities to empathetically connect with patients is the reward. She adds, “If I have a student participating in the inpatient psychiatric karaoke group, I know I’ve done my job right.”

School of Nursing Flag Bearer

Julia Zellmer



Julia Zellmer's energetic, compassionate presence brings people together and lifts the spirits of everyone around her. Throughout the ABSN program, Zellmer became known for her curiosity, willingness to speak up, and commitment to creating a supportive learning environment. As one nominator shared, she "leads with integrity, compassion, and courage, consistently uplifting those around her through both her words and actions."

Her eighteen nominators (the most of any academic award recipient) repeatedly emphasized her energy and inclusivity, noting that she is "an experienced, outspoken advocate for her patients" and "is known and loved by us all." Many highlighted her leadership in the classroom and her advocacy for classmates. Others pointed to her warmth and humor, sharing that "Julia's school spirit is unmatched."

Zellmer's dedication extends beyond personality. She is known as a hardworking, skilled nursing student who balances academics, clinical work, and her role as a certified nursing assistant with grace and determination. Classmates praised her as "a constant source of inspiration and positive motivation." Her involvement as the ABSN student representative on the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee further demonstrated her dedication to ensuring student voices are heard.

"Being selected as the School of Nursing Flag Bearer is super meaningful to me because it recognizes both my journey and everyone who helped me through," Zellmer said. She added with characteristic enthusiasm, "Also, I love flags!" Her peers agree—Zellmer embodies the unity, spirit, and vibrant energy of the ABSN community.

School of Nursing Outstanding Undergraduate Student Award

Peter Felt



Peter Felt's compassion, curiosity, and quiet determination set him apart. Classmates describe Felt as someone who not only excels academically but also brings deep humanity to every interaction. One nominator shared that "the compassion that he carries for his patients and the profession shines through his attitude and bedside care," adding that he is the kind of peer who "acts as emotional support when times are tough."

Felt's personal journey through nursing school reflects that same blend of vulnerability and strength. He shared candidly about the self-doubt he carried into the program, recalling a warning he received when first voicing that he wanted to be a nurse: 'I don't see it for you.' Those words lingered, fueling internal questions about whether he was "smart enough," "empathetic enough," or capable of staying calm under pressure. But as the accelerated program unfolded, he slowly, steadily found evidence that he was more capable than he believed.

Felt said he watched his first pathophysiology lecture three times, bracing for failure, only to find an A waiting for him in the gradebook. He spent long nights in Signe Skott Cooper Hall pushing through repetition and fatigue until the material clicked. By end of term, he had earned a 4.0 GPA. "It wasn't the result of effortless understanding or natural brilliance, but of long nights, repetition, and refusing to quit," he said.

His clinical experiences further solidified that confidence. When a patient became unresponsive, Felt moved instinctively, calling his preceptor, initiating CPR, and staying focused amid the chaos. "For the first time," he said, "I confronted my inner doubt and answered it with a powerful, resounding 'enough.'"

"My time in nursing school has been the bumpiest ride of my life, but it has shaped me into the most inspired version of myself," he says. Felt's hard work has paid off. He landed his dream role in the Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit (CVICU) and hopes to one day precept future students. His goal is simple and profound: to help someone else silence the voice that once told him, "You're not capable," and replace it with belief.

Outstanding Badger Nurse Alumni Award

Amy Jochsett Perez, BSN'21, RN



Amy Perez's journey to nursing was shaped by her lived experiences, personal losses, and by an early awareness that care must be equitable, accessible, and grounded in respect for every patient. Her background, shaped by adversity and perseverance, gave her an understanding of how people's circumstances can impact access to health care. The challenges she overcame became a driving force behind her efforts to become the nurse that she is today.

Her nursing education, especially at UW–Madison, provided both the rigorous foundation and the supportive community she needed to translate those experiences into purposeful practice. While completing her BSN as part of the traditional program at UW–Madison, Perez balanced

academics with employment and navigated personal challenges, including caring for her terminally ill grandmother in Mexico. Perez notes that her grandmother's death – which she believes could have been preventable with early detection – became a pivotal moment in her nursing journey. It deepened her understanding of nursing as both a science and a practice, strengthening her commitment to reproductive health, health equity, and patient advocacy.

Perez has built an extraordinary early career across high-acuity settings. Her training in COVID intensive care, burn care, and pediatric intensive care sharpened her ability to think critically under pressure and to navigate clinical uncertainty with clarity and empathy. These skills prepared her for the complex and emotionally demanding work she faces in her career.

Perez extended her impact, traveling nationally to clinics experiencing unusually high patient volumes. She helped strengthen clinical capacity by training nurses, midwives, and advanced practice providers in ultrasound skills and patient centered reproductive health care. With an emphasis on evidence-based practice and using education in service to others, she helped guide patients through their time of need to ensure safe, high-quality care during times of rapid system change.

Perez now serves as a high-risk labor and delivery nurse at a Level IV perinatal center, where she provides expert, trauma-informed care to patients with complex medical and psychosocial needs, including those experiencing fetal demise or pregnancies not compatible with life. Her practice focuses on patient autonomy and thoughtful communication in moments of profound vulnerability to help patients feel informed and empowered during times of uncertainty.

She is committed to shaping the future of the profession. As a clinical instructor and mentor, Perez supports nursing students, particularly those interested in maternal, mental, and reproductive health, by helping them prepare for the clinical, emotional, and ethical demands of practice. She stays connected to UW–Madison through ongoing mentorship and professional relationships that continue to inform her approach to leadership and teaching.

Through her clinical excellence, commitment to service, and engagement with students, Perez embodies what it means to be a Badger nurse. Her early career reflects the foundation built at UW–Madison, and her impact is only just beginning.

Alumni Pin Recipients

The UW–Madison School of Nursing pin, designed in 1926, symbolizes a proud tradition of service. Each year, select pins are passed on from a past graduate to a new graduate as a sign of the recipient's achievement and future promise.

Carmela De Leon, Debra Hofmann, MS'09

Chloe Diamond, Joan Johnston '63, MS'68

Alice Hu, Deb Hummel '78, MS'82

Will Mihalovic, Carole Jo Drives '57 (d.)

Olivia Moore, Catherine McDougal '58

Carolyn Chi Nguyen, Mary Sullivan '83

Nicole Schmitt, Laurel Niemeyer '70

Fiona Sternbach, Dean's Pin

Kylie Sweeny, Board of Visitors Pin

Ethan Weinstein, Kari Keller '80

Allie Young, Mary Niemeyer '64 (d.)

The celebration continues at
nursing.wisc.edu/graduation-celebration-2026

The School of Nursing's mission is to develop leaders, innovators, and advocates for the profession and society through research, education, practice, policy, and outreach.

Our vision is to make discoveries, enhance systems, and advance health and health equity for Wisconsin and beyond.

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