



School of Nursing
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Doctoral Hooding Ceremony

Friday, May 8, 2026
Signe Skott Cooper Hall

CLASS OF 2026

SIGNIFICANCE OF ACADEMIC REGALIA

CAP & GOWN

Candidates for doctoral and terminal degrees wear an eight-sided black tam with a gold tassel. The doctoral gown, symbolizing the final degree in the three principal levels of academic achievement, is made of black material and has an open front with bell-shaped sleeves. Doctoral gowns are further embellished with velvet trim in the form of crossbars on the sleeves.

HOOD

Academic hoods are used to further identify the level of degree attainment. Velvet edging on the hood displays the color of the appropriate discipline, blue for Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and apricot for Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP). The lining of the hood represents the color of the institution, cardinal red at UW-Madison. Compared to bachelor's and master's, doctoral hoods have the widest velvet edging, wide panels at either side, greater length, and a fully exposed lining.

CORDS & STOLES

Graduation cords are worn to signify achievements, memberships, and leadership roles. Nursing specific cords this year include a purple and white cord, signifying membership in the Sigma Honors Society. Graduates are welcome to further distinguish their memberships, identity, and achievements through individualized cords and stoles.

NOTICE OF FILMING & PHOTOGRAPHY

When you attend this event, you enter an area where photography, audio, and video recording may occur. By entering the event premises, you consent to such recording media and its release, publication, exhibition or reproduction. If you do not wish to have your photo taken, kindly let the photographers know. Thank you.

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

Remarks to the Graduates

Caitlin Conway

Doctor of Philosophy Program

Eric Ido-Bruce

Doctor of Nursing Practice Program

Presentation of Awards

Ashley Smith

DNP Excellence Award

Julie Franzen

Doctoral Flag Bearer

Rachel Hawn

Mary L. Keller Research Award

Micayla Meyers Madell

Signe Skott Cooper Writing Award

Katie Gillespie, DNP, RN, CPH, FAAN

DAISY Award for Nursing Educators in an Academic Setting

Sarah Dobbins, DNP, RN

DAISY Award for Nursing Educators in a Clinical Setting

Karen Solheim '73, PhD, RN, FAAN

Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award

Announcement of Graduates

Doctor of Philosophy

Kristine L. Kwekkeboom, PhD, RN, FAAN

Rachel Odes, PhD, RN

Megan Zuelsdorff, PhD

Tonya Roberts, PhD, RN, FGSA

Doctor of Nursing Practice

Sarah Endicott, DNP, PMHNP-BC, GNP-BC, FNAP

Lisa C. Bratzke, PhD, RN, FAHA

Jen Lange, DNP, APNP, FNP-BC, CNE-cl

Carrie Bennett, DNP, RN, APNP, GCNS-BC

Kitty Montgomery, PhD, RN, PCNS-BC

Katie Gillespie, DNP, RN, CPH, FAAN

Gina Bryan, DNP, PMHCNS-BC, APNP, FNAP, FAAN

Roberta Pawlak, PhD, RN, NEA-BC

Closing Remarks

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

Interim Dean and Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor

Doctor of Philosophy

Caitlin J. Conway

Impacts of Criminal-Legal System Involvement on Substance Use Treatment and Harm Reduction Utilization among People Who Use Drugs

Rachel Hawn ^Σ [◊]

A Survey of Symptom Experiences and Physical Activity Engagement among Survivors of Adolescent and Young Adult Cancers

Cierra Janae Heitman

Understanding Patterns of Hypertension Management Among Black Adults to Reduce Racial Disparities in Blood Pressure Control

Yamikani Bridget Nkhoma-Mussa ^Σ

Examining Experiences of Respectful Maternity Care During the Perinatal Period among Immigrant Women of Color in the US. Healthcare System

Doctor of Nursing Practice

Adult/Gerontology Acute Care

Katalina A. Cade

Mobilizing Dialogue: Enhancing Bedside Conversations to Strengthen BMAT 2.0 Implementation

Caitlin Girdley [◊]

Development of a Resource Guide for Undergraduate Clinical Nursing Instructors in the Hospital Setting

Teresa L. Lincicum [◊]

Evaluation of a Cardiac POCUS Curriculum for Advanced Practice Providers (APPs)

Lizbeth Lopez

Improving the Effectiveness of the Liver Transplant Discharge Process Through Standardized Coordinator-Led Education

Jenna Maiorelle

Enhanced Nursing Documentation for Central Line Removal Readiness

Adult/Gerontology Primary Care

Brandon Geracie

Doxycycline Post-Exposure Prophylaxis in High-Risk Individuals for Bacterial Sexually Transmitted Infections

Tessa J. Lewis [◊]

Addressing Burnout in Public Health Nursing with a Structured Peer Support Program in a Local Public Health Department

Hannah Livesey

Screening and Follow-up for Loneliness in Community Dwelling Older Adults

Kerry McNamara [◊]

Mitigating Workplace Violence: Investigating Staff's Needs to Diminish Occurrences and Effects of Workplace Violence

Jane Movrich

A Program Evaluation of a Virtual Care Pilot Program on Primary Care Access

Sheri Wong

Enhancing Breast Cancer Risk Detection in Primary Care Using the Tyrer-Cuzick Risk Assessment Tool

Clinical Nurse Specialist

Lisa Spencer

Normothermia in Surgery: Implementation of Preoperative Active Warming Standards

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

◊ - Earned a Nurse Educator Certificate from UW-Madison

Doctor of Nursing Practice CONTINUED

Pediatric Primary Care

Jenna Lorraine Denny

Stronger Futures: A Toolkit to Support Pregnant and Parenting Students

Micayla Ridley Meyers Madell

Implementing a Home Nasogastric Tube Program on an Inpatient Pediatric Unit

Population Health

Julie Franzen ^Σ

Evaluation of a Reproductive Nurse Navigator Program in a Local Health Department

Eric Ido-Bruce ^Σ

Empowering LGBTQ Adolescents Through Social Media Education: A Health Literacy Focused Evidence-Based Practice Pilot Initiative

Psychiatric Mental Health

Gabrielle Hanlon-Hoepfner ^Σ

Co-occurring Autism Spectrum Disorder and Bipolar Disorder Across the Lifespan: A Care Guideline for Psychiatric Clinicians

Erin Judkins

Improving Interrater Reliability of the LSP-16 through Consensus Building: A Quality Improvement Project in a Community Intervention Setting

Molly Meyers Boson ^{Σ °}

Developing a Behavioral Management Workshop to Promote a Culture of Safety in the Inpatient Setting

Systems Leadership & Innovation

Mary Helen A. Cejka-Rivet ^{Σ °}

Evaluating the Sustainability and Impact of PAINAD Scale Integration into the Electronic Health Record on Pain Assessment and Management in Patients with Advanced Dementia

Anna M. Kohl ^Σ

Addressing Nursing Staff Readiness for Virtual Nurse Admissions in a Rural Community Hospital

Susan R. Sattler ^Σ

Evaluating interoperability between public health and healthcare systems

Anastasia Isabel Peer-Drake

Quality Improvement Initiative: Implementing a School-Based Sleep Support Program for Adolescents

Tinea Patricia Vanderwerff

Barriers to Completing and Reviewing Asthma Management Plans in Primary Care at Children's Wisconsin

Anna Lonergan

Improving Nutrition Practices in Early Childhood Education Through the Go NAPSACC Program

Ashley Smith ^{Σ °}

Assessing Social Determinants of Health Competence in Accelerated Baccalaureate Nursing Education

Eric Le Rowe

Reduction of Stigma for Borderline Personality Disorder through Staff Education: A Quality Improvement Program on an Adult Inpatient Psychiatric Unit

Ian M. Wegger [°]

Enhancing Cannabis Resources for College Health Providers - A Quality Improvement Project

Laura Vergenz [°]

Bridging the Gap: Developing and Pilot Testing ASCEND-AI (Adaptive Simulation for Competency Enhancement & Nursing Development using Artificial Intelligence) in an Accelerated Undergraduate Nursing Program

Pieter A. Vernon

From Telehealth to Readiness: Enhancing Diagnostic Accuracy in Military Medicine

2026 Graduation Speakers & Award Recipients

PhD Graduation Speaker

Caitlin Conway



Caitlin Conway is a steadfast advocate, mentor, and voice for graduate students across the School of Nursing. As one nominator shared, "Caitlin is a thoughtful and articulate speaker and will represent the graduate students well at this important event."

Conway has served the School of Nursing in far-reaching ways: participating in faculty candidate interviews, serving on committees, and contributing to the Dean search and screen process. Her presence in these roles reflects both her commitment to strengthening the student experience and her dedication to the future of nursing scholarship.

Her vision for the graduation address centers on honoring the collective resilience of her cohort. "Earning a PhD requires persistence in the face of uncertainty, delays, and repeated revision," she said. "As nurses, that persistence is...an expression of our conviction that patients and communities deserve better answers, and that nursing as a discipline has the compassion and conviction to generate them."

Conway reflects on the challenges her peers have navigated, including advising changes, immigration concerns, and personal loss. "The PhD asks us to be vulnerable: to put our ideas forward, to be evaluated, to revise, and to persist." She also highlights the profound rewards of this path: recognition of impactful research, the joy of contributing new knowledge, and "meaningful moments of teaching and mentoring that expand nursing's impact into future generations."

Conway's commitment to rigor, compassion, and service makes her an inspiring representative of the Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing graduating class, and a fitting voice to honor their journey to graduation.

DNP Graduation Speaker

Eric Ido-Bruce



Throughout the DNP program, Eric Ido-Bruce has stood out as a steady, thoughtful, and inspiring presence. His peers speak of him with incredible gratitude and admiration. One nominator shared, "Eric is the kind of leader every cohort hopes for... he has been our Samwise, steady when things felt overwhelming, grounded when the climb got steep, and always reminding us why we started in the first place." Another added, "Eric embodies the very qualities our profession strives to cultivate: dedication, integrity, compassion, and visionary leadership."

Ido-Bruce's commitment to nursing is multidimensional. His peers note his passion for planetary health, his advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community, and his ability to "communicate with clarity and heart." They emphasize his rare combination of humility and confidence and marvel at his ability to break down complex systems-level issues while offering steadfast encouragement during long nights of research revisions and moments of doubt. As one nominator put it, "Eric did not just complete this journey. He helped carry this cohort through it."

Beyond his leadership, Ido-Bruce is recognized as an exceptional, warm, and authentic communicator who is deeply grounded in purpose. "I wish to demonstrate how our education at the UW—Madison School of Nursing has prepared us for the challenges we are going to face," Ido-Bruce says. "The world we live in right now is one that is strained and divided and we see the consequences of that show up in our health systems, communities, and patient lives...This is not a passive time for nursing, it's a defining one." He describes his intended message simply and powerfully. "The theme of my speech is straightforward and simple: This is our moment, let's meet it."

Ido-Bruce brings kindness and hope into every space he enters. His commitment to advocacy, equity, and meaningful change makes him an exceptional representative of the graduating Doctor of Nursing Practice class.

DNP Excellence Award

Ashley Smith



Ashley Smith's work reflects a deep commitment to community health, equity, and the future of the nursing profession. Her journey has been shaped by a clear sense of purpose and by mentors who recognized her potential early on. "Receiving this award reflects the communities I serve and the people who believed in me before I fully believed in myself," she said.

Throughout her doctoral training, Smith immersed herself in work that bridges public health, nursing education, and systems-level leadership. Her academic focus on social determinants of health as a clinical pathway shaped her approach to both scholarship and practice. She described being "pushed to slow down, question assumptions, and look beyond individual patient encounters to the structures that shape health and access to care," a shift that guided her leadership in national advocacy, curriculum development, and community-based work.

Smith wove service throughout her DNP experience, and her impact extended far beyond the classroom. She engaged in environmental health policy advocacy in Washington, DC; held leadership roles with American Public Health Association, Wisconsin Public Health Association, and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing; and served as the Global Nursing Lead for the Planetary Health Report Card. Her work with Indigenous villages in Belize further deepened her understanding of how structural barriers influence care.

Balancing academics, leadership, and motherhood, Smith learned to align her responsibilities with intention and clarity. "Completing the Doctor of Nursing Practice program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison has been one of the greatest honors of my life," she said. "Not because of a title or recognition, but because of who I have become in the process." Her story reflects a nurse committed to shaping healthier communities and a stronger, more equitable future for the profession.

Doctoral Flag Bearer

Julie Franzen



Julie Franzen is a grounded, principled public health nurse whose work is rooted in community connection and social justice. Throughout her doctoral studies, Franzen brought a clear-eyed understanding of how health is shaped long before someone enters a clinic. As one nominator shared, she is "on the ground, doing the difficult, essential work required to bridge gaps in care and improve social determinants of health." Her peers describe her as a leader guided by dignity, compassion, and a steadfast moral compass—someone whose impact will resonate in her community for years to come.

Franzen's academic and practicum experiences reflect that commitment. She worked with community partners on initiatives addressing health disparities and supported populations facing significant barriers to care, including individuals receiving HIV services, people impacted by substance use within the Department of Corrections, and residents of rural communities. Her approach is consistently relationship-based and centers trust, respect, and the lived experiences of those she serves.

Her advocacy extends beyond local work and she has demonstrated a commitment to equity and structural change. Franzen represented UW–Madison at the The American Association of Colleges of Nursing policy summit, where she championed issues such as student loan assistance, grants for nursing instructors, and tax credits for preceptor pay. She has also shared the possibilities of nursing with diverse audiences, presenting to undergraduate students and participating in career fairs with the Boys & Girls Club and Madison-area schools, highlighting the many possible pathways into the nursing profession.

Franzen's leadership, integrity, and community-centered vision make her a powerful ambassador to represent doctoral nursing graduates at Campus Commencement.

Mary L. Keller Research Award

Rachel Hawn



Rachel Hawn has demonstrated an exceptional combination of drive, curiosity, and commitment to advancing nursing science. Her faculty advisor, Dr. Kris Kwekkeboom, has worked with Hawn since she entered the PhD program in 2021. Dr. Kwekkeboom noted, "Ms. Hawn demonstrates the passion, integrity, and productivity to merit this award."

Hawn's research centers on improving health outcomes for survivors of adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancers, a population that often faces persistent symptoms and long-term health challenges. Upon arriving at UW-Madison shortly after completing her BSN, she quickly identified a gap in the literature: physical activity interventions for AYA cancer survivors rarely addressed the symptoms that make activity difficult. Her early systematic review confirmed that "few interventions were effective in improving physical activity engagement, and none included symptom self-management as a potential behavioral change technique."

This insight became the foundation of her dissertation, a large prospective study examining how symptom burden, individual symptoms, and psychosocial factors influence physical activity engagement among more than 200 AYA cancer survivors. Reaching this hard-to-locate population required persistence and creativity. Dr. Kwekkeboom highlighted that Hawn "engaged in multiple strategies... with local oncologists, state cancer organizations, and national AYA cancer support groups."

Hawn's work has already resulted in multiple publications, competitive grant funding, and a rich dataset that will guide the development of future interventions. Looking ahead, she envisions a career defined by collaboration, innovation, and impact. As she explains, "I hope to use research to serve the community and improve the well-being of individuals affected by cancer." Her trajectory makes clear that she is well on her way.

Signe Skott Cooper Writing Award

Micayla Meyers Madell



Micayla Meyers Madell brings together two powerful strengths, clinical insight and a gift for storytelling, to elevate the voices of patients who are too often overlooked. She is a thoughtful, persistent writer whose work demonstrates intellectual rigor and deep compassion. Her case report, published in the *Journal of Pediatric Healthcare*, is impactful for the under-researched pediatric population with autism spectrum disorder. The publication stands as a meaningful contribution to a field where evidence is limited and clinical guidance is urgently needed.

For Micayla, the project was far more than an academic exercise. "I was moved by the case and felt a driving force to do this write-up for a patient who falls within an under-researched patient population," she said. "This patient was also nonverbal and medically complex. It felt important to give a voice to this patient and try to disseminate findings from his case to a larger audience." She completed the manuscript outside of course requirements, dedicating her summer to revisions, correspondence with the journal, and the meticulous work of preparing a publishable piece.

Micayla credits her clinical and faculty instructors for encouraging her to take on the challenge, noting that their support "gave me the courage to go out of my comfort zone and make it happen." The resulting publication reflects not only her skill as a writer but her commitment to advocacy, equity, and patient-centered care.

"I am deeply grateful to receive the Signe Skott Cooper Writing Award. Nursing and writing together reflect the core of who I am as both a scholar and a person," Micayla said. Her work exemplifies the power of writing to advance understanding—and to honor the patients whose stories deserve to be told.

DAISY Award for Nursing Educators in an Academic Setting

Katie Gillespie, DNP, RN, CPH, FAAN



Katie Gillespie is known among doctoral students as a mentor whose influence reaches far beyond the classroom. Her teaching is described as steady, intentional, and deeply human. Students note that Gillespie invests in the whole person—nurse, scholar, leader, parent—and that her guidance has shaped not only their academic success but their lives.

One nominator shared that Gillespie, in moments when school, work, and life collided, offered clarity rather than pressure. She helped this student slow down, assess her capacity, and make decisions rooted in integrity. That mentorship, the student wrote, “fundamentally changed how I understand leadership.”

Gillespie’s impact is equally profound in the learning environment. Students describe her as fair and respectful with a thoroughly collaborative approach to teaching. As an educator who creates space for transparency, struggle, and questions, her feedback is “honest and thoughtful, grounded in growth rather than judgment,” and her presence models the kind of ethical, sustainable leadership that nursing education urgently needs. Gillespie is a steady source of encouragement and her coursework opens doors to new passions, including public health and social justice, and her advocacy helps students uncover their own potential.

Across nominations one theme is unmistakable: Gillespie’s mentorship changes trajectories. She inspires students to think bigger, lead with integrity, and believe in themselves. As one student wrote, “Katie Gillespie has not just supported my academic success. She has shaped my life.”

DAISY Award for Nursing Educators in a Clinical Setting

Sarah Dobbins, DNP, RN



Sarah Dobbins is admired by students for her expertise, compassion, and visionary leadership in public health nursing. As one of the only public health DNP practitioners in the Madison area, Dobbins has become an essential mentor for students seeking practicum experiences that stretch their thinking and expand their sense of what nursing leadership can be. One nominator shared that she “has gone above and beyond to support students in the DNP program at UW–Madison,” offering practicum opportunities that are both rigorous and meaningful.

As a preceptor, Dobbins encourages students to take initiative while providing the guidance needed to grow with confidence. She mentored four students in a single academic year, including two for their full DNP projects, and supported work that spans nurse wellbeing, home visiting program enrollment, and evaluation of a new nurse navigation program. As one nominator wrote, “With Sarah’s support, these projects will impact the health of our community.”

Dobbins’ own reflections illuminate why her mentorship resonates so deeply. “One of my favorite aspects of my role as a DNP in local public health is the opportunity to partner with the UW–Madison School of Nursing and precept students,” she shares. Dobbins strives to create learning environments that balance support with autonomy, where students feel challenged, encouraged, and empowered to develop their professional voice. Empathy, respect, and equity-focused leadership guide her approach as she tailors mentorship to each student’s strengths and growth areas.

She is especially proud of supporting projects with systems-level impact, initiatives that help students see how their work can influence programs, policies, and community health outcomes. As she reflects on this recognition, Dobbins adds, “I am deeply honored to receive the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurse Educators... Teaching and mentoring future nurse leaders is one of the most meaningful parts of my work.”

Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award

Karen Solheim '73, PhD, RN, FAAN



The University of Wisconsin–Madison Nurses Alumni Organization (UW NAO) proudly recognizes professor emerit Karen D. Solheim '73, PhD, RN, FAAN, as the recipient of the 2026 NAO Distinguished Achievement Award, honoring a career defined by strong leadership, global health engagement, and a deep commitment to advancing health equity.

Dr. Solheim's nursing journey began long before college, when her family saw how naturally she cared for others. UW–Madison later gave her the academic foundation and professional direction to turn that early instinct into a lifelong career in nursing. From her first years as a staff nurse to her roles as clinical professor, undergraduate program director, and coordinator of

Global Health Initiatives for the School of Nursing, she has embodied the Wisconsin Idea and extended the reach of the university far beyond campus into communities worldwide.

Through a career spanning more than five decades, Dr. Solheim has built an exceptional record of impact on global health, community practice, nursing education, and humanitarian service. Her work with displaced populations, along with extensive teaching and leadership roles, has shaped her enduring commitment to health equity and global health.

Dr. Solheim's far-reaching impact includes service and scholarship efforts worldwide, including Somalia, Cambodia, India, and Malawi. As Co-Founder and Co-President of International Partners for Education, she has helped expand educational access for youth in Malawi. Her scholarship, spanning global health nursing, community partnerships, curriculum innovation, and planetary health, has informed practice and education on an international scale.

In her positions at the School of Nursing throughout her career, Dr. Solheim has impacted generations of Badger nurses. She helped guide the school's move to a concept-based curriculum and developed key courses in community health and global nursing. Her contributions to teaching were recognized with the Chancellor's Hildale Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2017. Beyond individual courses, her work helped strengthen global health programming and long-term educational structures that continue to support students and faculty across the school today.

Dr. Solheim reflects the School of Nursing's mission through her work strengthening systems, building community partnerships, and supporting inclusive, forward-thinking education. Her work with Doors for Refugees and community mental health programs in Madison, such as Jewish Social Services, demonstrates a commitment to nursing practice that extends into community health, engagement, education, and support beyond traditional clinical settings.

Her lifetime of service includes extensive leadership across campus, recognition as a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing, serving on the American Academy of Nursing's Global Expert Panel, and participation in interdisciplinary groups focused on forced migration and global health.

Even in retirement, she continues to support the next generation of nurses, including volunteering through the Badger Nurse Mentorship Program, where she helps guide and mentor current Badger nursing students.

For her deep commitment to global health, educating future nursing leaders, and ensuring that vulnerable and displaced populations receive compassionate and capable care, Dr. Solheim truly exemplifies the spirit of the Distinguished Achievement Award. Her career reflects not only achievement, but a legacy of changing lives.

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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