

8 students from record-breaking graduating class share their exceptional stories

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Following three years of record-breaking graduating classes, the largest group of University of Wisconsin Oshkosh students yet will receive degrees at the 134th Spring Commencement ceremonies on Saturday, May 17, bringing this year's total number of graduates to well over 2,000.

Chancellor Richard H. Wells will confer more than 1,400 diplomas to undergraduate and graduate students at the ceremonies at Kolf Sports Center, 785 High Ave.

The 9 a.m. ceremony will be for undergraduate and graduate students in the College of Letters and Science. A 2 p.m. ceremony will include students in the colleges of business, education and human services, and nursing.

"We are very proud of our graduates," said Chancellor Wells. "Our business graduates scored in the top 5 percent on the national Educational Testing Service business knowledge exam; our nursing and education students consistently score above state and national pass rate averages on their licensure exams; and students from the College of Letters and Science are coveted by the best professional and graduate schools in the country."

"The outstanding value-added education provided to UW Oshkosh students is a great testament to the dedication of our faculty and staff," said Provost Lane Earns. "We are proud to be providing the region with more and better-prepared graduates."

Eight graduating students have agreed to share their unique stories with the media:

Student/faculty collaboration provides professional film experience

It's rare for a student to volunteer for roughly 100 hours of homework, especially when there are no academic credits involved. But Michael Buck has no regrets about signing up for his radio/TV/film professor's short film project.

Buck, of Ripon, worked with UW Oshkosh faculty, alumni and students to create "Brothers," a short film about three brothers faced with the prospect of selling off the family farm. He served as an assistant camera operator during production and as an editor for postproduction. "Brothers" already has been accepted into festivals and has won a national award. Best of all, Buck can add "professional film experience" to his resume.

- Read more about him here: www.uwosh.edu/today/?p=839.

Major and minor make for award-winning research

While working on a radio feature about domestic abuse, Kayla Chilsen, of Appleton, learned that she wanted to use her education and skills to help others. The project draws from her major, radio/TV/film, as well as her minor, sociology.

Chilsen spent many hours preparing and producing “Domestic Abuse: A Radio Feature,” an emotional piece that proves the media can make a positive impact on society. The five-minute feature includes an interview with a domestic abuse survivor, along with clips from campus advocates and representatives of Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services in Oshkosh. It earned Chilsen an undergraduate award during UW Oshkosh’s Celebration of Scholarship event in April.

Graduate program gives student a global view

Michelle Dirks-Luebbe learned lessons outside of her coursework while earning her Master of Public Administration degree at UW Oshkosh. The technical, hands-on learning that incorporated real-life examples opened her eyes to new interests and ideas. For one project, she worked with city administrators on policy analyses for the community. Her dedication to academic and civic pursuits earned her the Stephen Hintz MPA award.

Dirks-Luebbe, of Wausau, also was inspired by her fellow students, who came from diverse backgrounds, and MPA faculty, who were always willing to go above and beyond the call of duty.

Graduation Project helps student get a second chance

Dropping out of school after a semester of earning mostly Fs often spells the end of a student’s educational journey, yet Matthew Field, 28, decided to get back into the saddle, rededicating himself to his studies.

Thanks to the Graduation Project, a UW Oshkosh program that works with students who are a few credits away from completing a degree, Fields, of West Bend, finished the last of his coursework in December and will be presented with a degree at commencement May 17, as his wife and daughters look on from the audience.

- Find out more about the Graduation Project here:
www.uwosh.edu/graduationproject/graduationproject.php.

‘Start sooner to get a better return of investment’

With four children and a full-time job, Jodi Hibbard, 41, already had a life packed full of responsibilities. But that didn’t stop her from embracing a new challenge: enrolling in a new collaborative nursing program.

Hibbard, of Manitowoc, is among the first group of students graduating through UW Oshkosh’s Sheboygan, Manitowoc, Lakeshore Program (SMLS), which partners with UW-Sheboygan, UW-Manitowoc and Lakeshore Technical College to help individuals currently working in the nursing field

complete their Bachelor of Science-Nursing degrees. Hibbard's advice for young learners: "Start your educational process sooner to get a better return on investment!"

Music major overcomes obstacles

Folk/acoustic musician Tony Memmel has been playing guitar since he was 14. Although he was born without a left hand, Memmel, of Milwaukee, has more than made up for it with sheer determination, a lot of talent and plenty of Gorilla Tape.

The music business major organized and performed for many Open Mic and Live and Lunch events at Reeve Memorial Union. He also met his recording partner, fellow student Scott Puro, while attending UW Oshkosh. Memmel's debut album, "Tale of an Underdog," debuted in March. After graduation, he looks forward to continuing to write and perform songs about his experiences and observations.

Mommel will play the national anthem at the morning commencement ceremony.

- Read more about him here: www.uwosh.edu/today/?p=637.

Nontraditional student receives warm welcome on campus

When Autumn Ristau enrolled at UW Oshkosh, she might have felt like a fish out of water. The nontraditional student was a first-generation college student as well as a wife and mother of two. To her surprise — and delight — the faculty and students never treated her differently than any other student.

Ristau, of Princeton, values not only the wealth of knowledge she obtained in the classroom, but also the work experience she gained along the way, including field placement at Green Lake County's Department of Health and Human Services. She will graduate with honors on May 17, receiving a Bachelor of Social Work degree. With the help of one of her "amazing and accessible" professors, Ristau has applied for graduate school.

'Renaissance woman' receives one more award

Look in the dictionary under "overachiever," and you're bound to see a picture of Sarah Schettle. While attending UW Oshkosh, the chemistry and Spanish double major has been involved with more than a dozen student organizations, volunteered for countless organizations and captained both the track and field team and the swimming and diving team — all the while maintaining a 3.9 grade-point average. She was named NCAA Sportsmanship Person of the Year in 2006.

Schettle, of Oshkosh, will receive the Chancellor's Award for Excellence at commencement May 17. She intends to go on to graduate school and pursue a master's degree in physician assistant studies.