

UW-Stout: Dietetics major part of pandemic effort as medic in Wis. Air National Guard

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Menomonie, Wis. — By the third week of March, students at University of Wisconsin-Stout

were absorbing the shock that they would have to leave campus for the rest of the semester because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sarah Dickmann, a junior majoring in dietetics, then learned that her world would be turned upside down even more: She was being called to active duty as a member of the Wisconsin Air National Guard, also because of the pandemic.

“I kind of started to panic, not knowing how I would be able to keep up with my classes,” said Dickmann, of Shawano.

Her transition to alternative learning, with no face-to-face instruction, suddenly was just one part of the day-to-day adjustment she would have to make.

Almost a month into her assignment, Dickmann is making do in the classroom and proud to be serving her state and country during what she calls a “once-in-a-lifetime situation.”

“In a time when so many people feel helpless, we get the opportunity to help,” she said.

Two more UW-Stout students in the Guard have been activated with other units, Ger Vang, of Green Bay, a sophomore majoring in industrial design; and Allan Kralewski, of Durand, a first-year student majoring in construction.

Dickmann, a senior airman and medic, is part of the 128th Air Refueling Wing from Milwaukee. Her unit is in Madison, providing support in communities around the state where needed because of the coronavirus. Her duties include temperature checks, nasal swabs and monitoring patients for symptoms.

“We are all trained to be available for any and all medical assistance the state may need. Each day has been different, not exactly knowing where we may be called to go or what we are being called to do. We have specialized equipment that protects us for when we are in areas with possible or verified coronavirus patients. We are kept up to date with information and protocol to ensure we are keeping ourselves and each other safe and healthy,” she said.

When she heard that National Guard units in other states were being activated, she was expecting the call-up ordered by Wis. Gov. Tony Evers “especially being that I am a Medic, one of the front-liners in this viral attack.

“I have a good friend in the unit with me, and when we both received the news we were going to be activated we called each other and just simply said, ‘Well I guess it is our time to shine.’ And that is just how you have to be when you serve. No questions, no negative reactions, just action. In fact, we were excited to do our job, to provide real-time medical care. It is what we signed up for when we joined the National Guard — to serve the state of Wisconsin,” Dickmann said.

She joined the Guard when she was a senior in high school. Her father is a retired Air Force pilot, and she has two brothers in the Air Force.

Dickmann doesn’t know when her assignment will end and she can go back to focusing on just school, but she’s thankful for the support she’s received at UW-Stout. She cited the help of Sarah Godsave, military education benefits coordinator in the Veteran Services Office, and the Dean of Students Office.

“I was able work out agreements with my teachers to ensure I can finish my classes with extensions. My professors were extremely cooperative, and I thank them very much, as I also thank Sarah and the Dean of Students who made this stressful process a whole lot less stressful,” she said.



For the latest information about UW-Stout and the COVID-19 situation, go here. UW-Stout is Wisconsin's Polytechnic University, with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes.