

UW-Stout: Applied mathematics and computer science student becomes U.S. citizen

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Kayleigh Nel is a student, a Wisconsin National Guard specialist and now a U.S. citizen.

Nel, a University of Wisconsin-Stout senior majoring in [applied mathematics and computer science](#) with a concentration in [cybersecurity](#), emigrated to the U.S. from Dubai in 2014 with her family. On Sept. 16 in Minneapolis at the Immigration Services Headquarters, Nel took the oath of allegiance and was granted U.S. citizenship.

“I wanted to become a U.S. citizen because I do view the U.S. as my home now,” said Nel, who is scheduled to graduate in May. “I believe in a lot of the values of the U.S. to have free expression and free speech and to become who you want to become. What better way to hold down those values than to become a citizen of the country that holds those values?”

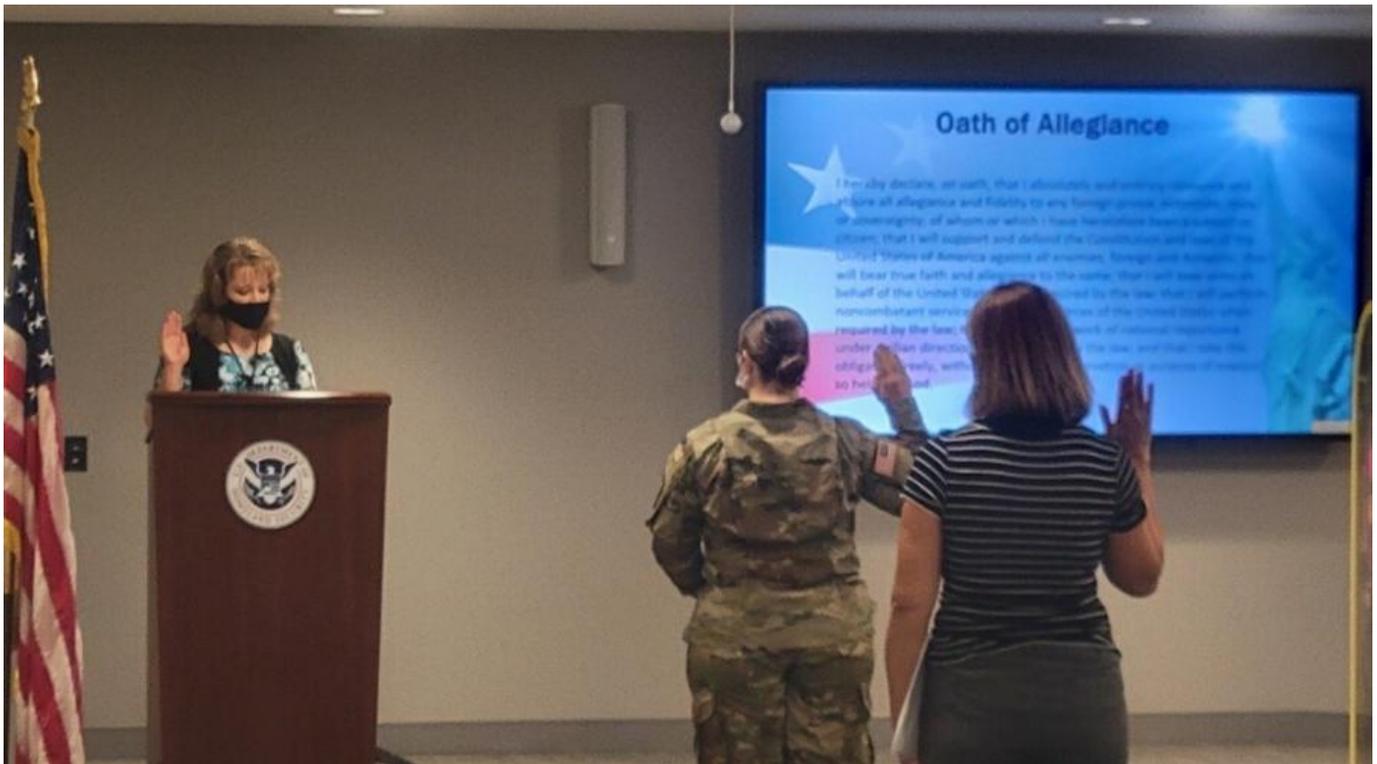
Nel moved with her family to Chicago but decided to attend UW-Stout because of the cybersecurity emphasis.

“It’s kind of like solving a puzzle,” Nel said. “Cybersecurity is about figuring out what is wrong and solving how to fix it.”

Nel is in her third year as a specialist with the Wisconsin National Guard. She joined the 950th Engineering Company based in Superior.

“It’s honestly really fun,” she said of the national guard. “I understand the military may not be for everyone, but it’s a blast. One time a month you go and learn new

job skills. We learned how to use heavy machinery. I have a new skill now. You learn a lot of leadership skills and you build your resume, and you get to support your community.”



Kayleigh Nel, in center, taking the oath of citizenship in Minneapolis. / Photo courtesy Kayleigh Nel

Nel started the process of earning her citizenship in December 2017 by getting a green card that allowed her to attend school as if she were a U.S. resident. It usually takes five years to get the paperwork in order, pass the tests and get approved for citizenship. Because of her military service, Nel was able to get citizenship fast-tracked.

Part of the process was filling out a 100-page application that listed all the places Nel had lived, gone to school and employment history for the past decade. She also had to list all travel outside the U.S. for the past five years. Review of the application can take up to eight months.

She then had to pass an English literacy verbal and written test. Part of her written test included naming Alaska as the largest state in the U.S.

To pass the citizenship test, she also had to get six of 10 questions correct about American history. One of the questions was what are two ways to participate in civil service? Nel answered correctly: voting and participating in a political group. She also had to name one of her legislative representatives. She listed Congressman Ron Kind.

“It’s not too hard if you look at a sheet they give you to study,” Nel said. “If you paid attention in a U.S. history class in high school, you would most likely pass it.”

Nel said she was excited to take the oath and was focused on making sure she repeated it carefully.

“It was kind of a relief after a four-year process,” Nel said. “A great weight was lifted off my shoulders. I am excited about my future opportunities. My dream is to join the FBI so I can go into cybersecurity and work for a government agency.”



Tyler Skorczewski photo / UW-Stout photo

Her father and mother, Dirk and Mary Nel, and her sister, Carissa Nel, are also in the process of becoming U.S. citizens. Nel also has citizenship from South Africa and the United Kingdom where her family lived at one time.

Tyler Skorczewski, associate professor of mathematics, statistics and computer science, said Nel always worked hard in his classes.

“It’s awesome she wants to become a citizen,” he said. “Our country is great because of people like Kayleigh. She is a wonderful person, and I’m glad UW Stout is big enough to offer the various technical courses required for the interdisciplinary cybersecurity program, but also have the small college get-to-know-everyone feel.

“Kayleigh will do very well in cybersecurity,” he added. “She has both the mathematical and computational skills needed to stay ahead of the curve in a field where staying ahead of the curve is paramount.”

Nel’s citizenship ceremony was part of Constitution Day and Citizenship Day celebrated between Sept. 17-23. A total of 21,000 new citizens in 335 naturalization ceremonies across the U.S. occurred during that time, according to a news release from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

“It is an honor to welcome so many new Americans this Citizenship Day and Constitution Day,” stated USCIS Director Ur M. Jaddou in a news release.

“Citizenship Day and Constitution Day are special days at USCIS – an agency where many people come to work every day to help those at home and abroad realize the full meaning of U.S. citizenship. As we take time to reflect on what citizenship means to each of us, let us share in the commitment to invest fully in this country’s promise to be a place of hope and possibilities for all.”