

# UW-Stout: Rehabilitation counseling graduate 'epitomizes service in her role,' receives national award

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Menomonie, Wis. – Jamie Stillion, a recent graduate of University of Wisconsin-Stout's [online Master of Science in rehabilitation counseling program](#), recently received the 2022 Rehabilitation Graduate Student of the Year Award from the National Council on Rehabilitation Education.

Stillion, a vocational rehabilitation specialist with the [Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services](#), manages a mixed caseload of adults and high school transition students, serving a primarily rural area in Claremore, Okla.

Professor DeLeana Strohl nominated Stillion for the NCRE award, which recognizes a master's level student who has demonstrated outstanding service, leadership, advocacy, and research contributions in rehabilitation or with individuals with disabilities.

"It is a very competitive field, so this truly speaks to Jamie's professionalism and dedication to those she serves, her leadership activities, the totality of her achievements and approach to serving clients," Strohl said.

"I have been an educator for 20 years. In my tenure, I have witnessed an array of stellar rehabilitation professionals enrolled in graduate programs. However, Jamie rises to a category I have never experienced. She epitomizes service in her role," Strohl added.

The annual NCRE conference and awards luncheon were held in April at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel and Marina in San Diego.

[NCRE](#) is dedicated to quality services for persons with disabilities through education and research.

### **A holistic approach to client care**

Stillion guides her clients through all aspects of vocational rehabilitation, including application, evaluation, job training and placement, and successful employment.

Within her nomination letter, Strohl described Stillion's holistic approach as she provides counseling to individuals with disabilities to help them understand their interests, skills and abilities, while developing accommodation skills and understanding the impacts of disability on employment.

Stillion works with local school districts' special education departments to coordinate provisions for high schools engaged in Pre-Employment Transition Services and also visits the schools in her free time to work with students.

"Jamie is always finding ways to increase and improve services to her students. She has found greater success with students when she takes a more active role," Strohl said. "Jamie is always planning and collaborating to find solutions and bring people together to meet the needs of those on her caseload."

In January, Stillion collaborated with the superintendent, principal, director of special education, and teachers to devise a plan with the Salina Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to create employment opportunities for students.

Along with a licensed professional counselor, Stillion is also co-leading a group for individuals who are in various stages of recovery from substance abuse. The group originated from an assignment in her Group Counseling course, where students

were assigned to develop a group after participating in a group themselves.

“I knew there was a need for groups locally addressing substance abuse, as the only options available were those with a religious theme,” Stillion said. “Not everyone necessarily wants to participate in those, and others just do not find them effective.

“I developed a group designed on that premise but wanted to go a step further and implement it, particularly for individuals who are involved with probation officers and ordered to attend group meetings,” she added.

Stillion approached the probation officer in the area she covers for approval, as well as the approval of the officer’s supervisors. She then talked to an LPC whom she knew had extensive background in substance abuse counseling and who could volunteer Saturday mornings to help.

“She agreed to co-lead the group with me,” Stillion said. “We started with 12 individuals on probation in January. Since that time, we have added one more group of individuals who are not on probation but want the support of a group to maintain their sobriety. To date, we have the two groups that meet weekly.”

### **Service and leadership go hand in hand**

Strohl feels Stillion’s service intersects with her leadership, as she provided her cohort members in the MSRC program with professional consultations and encouraged them to think deeper.

“When Jamie first entered our program at Stout, it became obvious quickly that she would be the cohort leader, and she has consistently gone above and beyond as a leader in her cohort,” Strohl said.

Stillion also provided support to her cohort after a member died by suicide, Strohl added.

For Stillion, service to others and leadership go hand in hand. “When we serve others, we are helping them gain the skills needed to be successful not only in employment, which is our ultimate goal, but they are also gaining valuable skills which will help them succeed in life,” Stillion said.

“I view part of this as leading by example. The best leaders do not tell others what to do but rather lead them in doing, with the end goal to develop other leaders. They praise in public and correct in private while giving credit to others and taking responsibility themselves,” she added.

Stillion was nominated by faculty and peers as an Outstanding Student Leader of the Year. She was recognized, along with more than 100 students, at the annual Leadership Awards on May 4.

Stillion graduated from UW-Stout with her third master’s on May 7. She also holds a master’s in public administration from Columbia Southern University and in business administration from University of Phoenix-Hawaii Campus, as well as a Bachelor of Science in health care administration from Columbia Southern University.

*UW-Stout is [Wisconsin's Polytechnic University](#), with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes.*