

UW-Green Bay: 50,000 Graduates Later, phoenix continue to rise, solve problems and ignite regional workforce

Posted on Wednesday, May 10, 2023

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GREEN BAY, Wis. – The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay's core mission of providing access to education that ignites the regional workforce will be realized this weekend as more than 1,100 eligible graduates and their families celebrate the 2023 Spring/Summer Commencement. The ceremony will be held on Saturday, May 13 in two ceremonies at the Kress Events Center on the UW-Green Bay campus.

Notably, UW-Green Bay will celebrate its 50,000th graduate* from the University; coming a long way in the 53 years since the first graduating class walked across the stage in 1970. Of the more than 1,000 students eligible to graduate in this commencement ceremony, 50% of graduates are considered First Generation graduates (the first in their family to attend college.)

The ceremony will honor graduates and celebrate with families from all four of UW-Green Bay's campuses (Green Bay, Marinette, Manitowoc and Sheboygan.) In addition to awarding associates, bachelors and masters degrees in high-demand areas such as nursing, education, business and environmental sciences, the University will recognize graduates in the Rising Phoenix program, where students earn their associates degrees before graduating from high school. More than 60 [Rising Phoenix](#) students have successfully completed their associates degree, a 100% increase from 2022.

Two ceremonies will be held.

Morning ceremony (9:30 a.m.)

- College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
- College of Health, Education & Social Welfare
- All Associates degrees from all four campuses including the Rising Phoenix program

Afternoon ceremony (2 p.m.)

- Austin E. Cofrin School of Business
- College of Science, Engineering & Technology

Every UW-Green Bay student has the power to rise. Graduates from the University are future-minded problem solvers and innovators, poised to transform the communities and the region. The stories below from the Class of 2023 exemplify the resiliency and tenacity found in every UW-Green Bay student.

FEATURED STUDENT SPEAKERS

Morning ceremony student speaker Hannah Beauchamp-Pope found her spark

It's a Sunday night, and while many of us are escaping into our favorite TV shows, Hannah Beauchamp-Pope is traveling back from Madison after a long day of public speaking. The reason? "I was invited by the Secretary of State to speak at the capitol, to turn out the vote for the Wisconsin State Supreme Court election, and I was happy to show up."

Like most UW-Green Bay graduates, Hannah has been rising and on the move during her time on campus. The Green Bay, Wis.-native has personally risen from the deepest personal depths (shared in her "Healing Us, Healing America" [TEDx talk](#).) in which she refers to "the notorious year of 2020." What brings her to the commencement stage, however, is what she's accomplished despite, and even during, one very bad year. [Read her story.](#)

Afternoon ceremony student speaker Kayla Lass impresses both on and off the volleyball court

Kayla Lass has always been a 'libero' at UW-Green Bay and proud of it. For those not fluent in Italian or volleyball, libero means "free" and denotes a back-row ball-

control specialist. Libero also describes Lass' style on the court. "I'm always just scrappy and fling my body places to get the ball." Furthermore, she adds, "I'm really good at defense."

What Lass, along with her entire team, have also been really good at is hitting the books— scoring in the top 10% of the NCAA Academic Progress Rate that recognizes top collegiate volleyball teams. Academic honors are not foreign territory to the [women's volleyball team](#), and Lass credits the coaching staff. "I honestly think Coach Abbey just really emphasizes being a student-athlete. You're a student just as much as you're an athlete." Lass has worked hard being both, earning Green Bay Volleyball's Academic and Most Improved Athlete awards. For good measure, she's graduating in four years with one of the University's most demanding majors - [Human Biology](#) with an emphasis in Exercise Science. [Read her story.](#)

GRADUATES FOCUSED ON MEETING REGIONAL WORKFORCE NEEDS

Nancy Christensen 54 years later and against all odds, a bachelor's degree

Nancy always knew that she'd receive her college degree. Her mom instilled in her and her seven sisters, the importance of higher education. What she didn't expect was the more than 50 years it took to finish and the incredible obstacles that would come up, threatening to derail her dream.

Life seemed "easy" in 1969 when she first enrolled in a Texas college. Then life happened. Marriage, children, divorce and suddenly, Nancy was on her own, managing work and family. She worked on college classes when she could, taking one or two classes at a time, at five different Universities over the years, slowly working on the path to completion thanks to the urging of her kids. Then Covid hit. In September of 2021, Nancy was hospitalized with acute Covid-19 and wasn't expected to make it. After three and a half months in the hospital, she was wheeled out to the cheering of doctors and nurses. Even after this experience, her fire to finish her degree was stronger than ever.

She credits her soon-to-be official Bachelor's in Organizational Leadership degree to UW-Green Bay's assistance with adult learners, online class options, and the constant urging from her oldest child. As she states, "I can only walk 40 feet without stopping, I'm on oxygen, in a wheelchair and older than dirt, but after 54 years of striving to get this degree, there is no way I'm missing this!"

From Combat Medic to Nursing Leader: This Veteran Takes on Opioid Epidemic

For a Phoenix, it's not only about the ascent, but also about the journey. Don Brock's 30-year voyage from a lab technician fresh out of high school to earning a Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay, is a story of perseverance, duty, and service that transcends traditions.

With more than 25 years of experience as an Air Force veteran and an accomplished ER nurse, Brock's capstone project exemplifies his commitment to serving others. He created and delivers a live presentation that educates students on identifying opioid overdoses and administering NARCAN, a life-saving medication. As he states, "Everyone deserves a chance to live, to be saved, and to seek assistance."

After joining the Air Force directly out of high school, he earned a two-year RN degree in 1995 and participated as a flight-nurse in Operations Desert Storm and Enduring Freedom. As he puts it, "We saved lives. That's the bottom line." Feeling overwhelmed and leaving both the military and nursing in 2007, Brock started his own business, but lost everything during the Great Recession. With nowhere to go but up, he returned to nursing and the Air Force, and higher education in 2010. Now, as a BSN and MSN graduate in 2023, he's just getting started.

University's 50,000th Graduate to be Celebrated

**For media information only: The 50,000th graduate will cross the stage during the afternoon ceremony. We ask that you please keep this quiet to preserve the element of surprise for the graduate and their family and friends, but we absolutely welcome and encourage you to consider covering this story!*