

UW-Stout: Graduate students receive scholarships to ‘build the capacity of state’s mental health workforce’

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Menomonie, Wis. – Seventeen University of Wisconsin-Stout master’s students have received \$85,000 in scholarships as part of a federal grant awarded to another UW System university.

UW-Whitewater’s Center for Inclusive Transition, Education and Employment was awarded \$9.1 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding to support graduate students in marriage and family therapy, counseling and social work across the seven UW System institutions with accredited programs.

The one-time federal award included \$2 million to support about 380 mental health students with a \$5,000 scholarship through the Qualified Treatment Trainee Grants Program.

Emma Desens is in her final semester of her master’s in marriage and family therapy at UW-Stout and is grateful to be awarded the QTT grant. Her clinical internship is at Family Therapy Associates, at the Menomonie and Eau Claire locations, and she will be joining their team upon graduation in May.

“This donation to my education will have a significant impact on my life. The financial security of receiving this grant enables me to explore continuing my education further with a doctorate degree,” said Desens, of Appleton.

“I am thankful for the opportunity to focus on my learning and growing as a therapist, rather than the financial stress, and I cannot express my appreciation enough in being chosen for this award,” she said.

The goal of the QTT grant is to “reduce barriers to program completion for diverse students and build the capacity of our state’s mental health workforce and behavioral health professionals,” said Jessica Smith, principal investigator for the grants program and CITEE director.

The award supports students in the completion of their internships, which are often unpaid or underpaid, creating financial barriers for those experiencing lower income, lower social support resources or additional noneducational expenses.

“The demand for competent mental health professionals has never been higher, particularly for traditionally underserved communities,” said Assistant Professor Heather Hessel, program director of M.S. marriage and family therapy at UW-Stout. “The funds from the QTT grant provide critical support for building and strengthening the pathways from graduate level training to effective delivery of mental health services to Wisconsin residents.”

Hessel serves on the QTT Statewide Advisory Committee and supported the outreach to students in marriage and family therapy, as well as M.S. clinical mental health counseling.

Along with Desens, UW-Stout graduate students, several of whom serve as Clinical Services Center student therapists, who received the QTT grant this spring include:

- Makai Dorfman, marriage and family therapy, Minneapolis
- Emily Erikson, marriage and family therapy, Altoona
- Zandra Georgakas, clinical mental health counseling, Ellsworth
- Mackenzie Gosa, marriage and family therapy, Blue River, Ore.
- Julia Jorgensen, marriage and family therapy, Madison
- Lindsey Laube, clinical mental health counseling, Eau Claire
- Hannah Malison, clinical mental health counseling, Milwaukee
- Chelsea Meagher, marriage and family therapy, Eau Claire
- Isabel Meyer-Mueller, marriage and family therapy, St. Paul
- Elizabeth Miner-Worland, marriage and family therapy, Philadelphia
- Maggie Mooney, clinical mental health counseling, Baldwin
- Frances Santiago, marriage and family therapy, St. Paul
- Hannah Schoening, clinical mental health counseling, Big Lake, Minn.
- Kaja Simon, marriage and family therapy, St. Paul
- Corey Tallier, clinical mental health counseling, Gilman
- Annie Xiong, clinical mental health counseling, Schofield

Nearly 270 graduate students applied for this round of funding, Smith said. She anticipates the final round for applications will open in spring 2023 to award the remaining 110+ awards.

CITEE received the award through Gov. Tony Evers and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to expand the work being done in the QTT Grants Program with DHS, Division of Care and Treatment Services.

A critical renovation to meet counseling needs UW-Stout's master's programs in marriage and family therapy; clinical mental health counseling; school counseling; and school psychology are housed in the Vocational Rehabilitation Building but are scheduled to relocate to Heritage Hall.

Heritage Hall, a near-50-year-old building, is scheduled for major renovation after receiving priority approval from the UW System Board of Regents. The project is ranked No. 1 in the Chippewa Valley and No. 3 for UW System academic buildings. The project includes the demolition of the 1954 portion of the Vocational Rehabilitation Building, where the four programs are housed.

"True to our applied learning mission, UW-Stout's graduate counseling programs provide services for the community, which will be further enhanced by the renovation of our Heritage Hall academic building. The building's renovation, which will provide reimagined spaces to better train our graduates, is a critical renovation to expand our counseling-related offerings and help graduate more students," Provost Glendalí Rodríguez said.

"The QTT Grants Program helps remove some of the financial burdens on students to complete their education and provides another compelling argument to pursue advanced education at UW-Stout.

Secured from a grant, the scholarship also provides a strong example of how Stout is committed to addressing workforce shortages of counseling professionals in Wisconsin and across the country," Rodríguez added.

UW-Stout is Wisconsin's Polytechnic University, with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes. Learn more via the FOCUS2030 strategic plan.