

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

College of Nursing

Nursing Alumni Newsletter

July 2026

Greetings from Dean Kristen Abbott-Anderson



Greetings to Alumni, Students, Faculty, Staff, and Friends of the College.

What a privilege it is to be sending you my greetings as Dean of the College of Nursing. As we reflect on this past year, I continue to be grateful. Grateful each year, to you, our alumni, current students, faculty, staff, and our many community partners. I continue to be humbled to serve as Dean in my fourth year, firmly on the foundation of those who came before me and those who will come after me. The foundation of our college is strong and built to sustain the many challenges we face in healthcare.

I am grateful to Associate Dean Jansen for her steadfast dedication to creating an annual newsletter that is packed with news about the college. This past year, we gave farewells, welcomed new faculty and staff, and celebrated several faculty and staff accomplishments. This year, we concluded a significant era as a college,

the phasing out of our Marshfield Site. While bittersweet, I hope you enjoy reading about the impact of our Marshfield Site and celebrate the many happy events we shared this year.

Some updates from my perspective as a dean in my fourth year:

On June 8th, we welcomed Katie Miles as my new Dean's Assistant. Katie brings with her a wealth of experience, including with the University. She is already taking on multiple responsibilities. We are thrilled that Katie has joined our team!

On July 1st this year, we welcomed our 9th Chancellor: Dr. Edwin Martini. We are truly excited about what is in store for the university and our college with Chancellor Martini at the helm. While we continue on the path established by former Chancellor Schmidt for our Vision 2030, I am looking forward to learning Chancellor Martini's vision for our university.

You may recall our plan to begin increasing our enrollment in our traditional baccalaureate (TBSN) program. We began to make these increases with our admission cycle in June 2025. In the most recent admission cycle, we admitted 90 students. The increased numbers have significant implications for ensuring we have a sound infrastructure and resources from the university to support this growth. This understanding is integral to a successful growth plan, and we proceed with great caution and consideration. With a strategic growth plan in place, we have a roadmap to support our success. We will continue to increase each new cohort of TBSN students by eight as long as we

have eligible applicants, faculty and staff to support growth, and access to clinical spaces to meet learning needs. Our goal is to cap our admission numbers at 130 students per cycle, for a total of 260 students admitted each year.

In addition to growth in our traditional BSN program, we are seeing growth in our graduate programs as well. Two new Doctor of Nursing Practice tracks launched last fall: Nursing Education Leadership and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner.

As with anything, change is the only constant, and that demands our continued focus and innovation as new challenges arise. We continue to strive for learning opportunities that support our students' success, and we continue to do so with an attitude of seeing the possibilities rather than impossibilities. I am extremely grateful for the support of many generous donors who have supported our students' travel to clinical sites at greater distances; this support avoids undue financial burden on our students as they are required to travel outside of the Eau Claire area for clinical experiences. We must continue to be open to change, to exploring possibilities beyond the traditional ways of doing our work—and to learning from these experiences.

Last year, I established a student advisory council. Two representatives from each cohort in our TBSN program (10 representatives), one representative from our BSN Completion program, and three representatives from our graduate programs have been invited to serve each semester. Many of the representatives remain on the council until they graduate, which means that I typically need only to recruit

new members for our sophomore cohort and replace any members who choose not to continue participation. Our meetings, which take place twice per semester, are intended to primarily be listening sessions. These meetings provide me with timely information that I can act on proactively as needed.

In addition to these important meetings, we held our clinical partner meeting this past fall. Our leadership team provided updates about our programs and solicited feedback from our partners. It was a meaningful discussion with our team taking feedback from the meeting to prioritize any needed changes or improvements. Overall, our partners expressed appreciation and approval of our work developing future nursing and advanced practice nursing professionals.

In conclusion, I would like to recognize our outstanding staff and faculty here who continue their commitment to our students, to their learning experiences, and to caring for our students as individuals. As a nursing college, we are equally blessed to have wonderful alumni and former faculty and staff who continue to connect with us and to care about the college.

I'll close with my standing invitation. If you are in the area, please reach out to me. I value the connections we make. Until next time, I wish you well.

Kind regards,



Kristen Abbott-Anderson, PhD, RN, CNE
Dean & Professor

Save the Dates

October 3, 2026: Nursing Alumni Homecoming Breakfast. Nursing alumni, family, friends, faculty/staff, and emeriti are invited to this event, with Check-in starting at 7:30 a.m.; Breakfast at 8:00 a.m.; Updates from the Dean at 8:30 a.m.; Door Prizes at 8:45 a.m.; and Building Tours at 9:00 a.m. in Room 119 of the Nursing Building.

Breakfast registration payment required by **Wednesday September 23rd**, using this [link](https://tinyurl.com/alumni-breakfast) or url: <https://tinyurl.com/alumni-breakfast>. Royal blue College of Nursing **T-shirts** also available for purchase at that link. T-shirt orders needed by **Wednesday September 9th**.



October 22-23, 2026: Mary C. and Fred Bliss Contemporary Nursing Lectureship. Dr. Oriana Beaudet, DNP, RN, FAAN, Vice President of Nursing Innovation for the American Nurses Association Enterprise (ANAE), will be speaking on *Nursing Innovation in Uncertain Times* on Thursday October 22nd in Davies Center. She also will be participating in additional sessions over the two days. More details and registration information will be forthcoming and available at this [link](#) or using this url: <https://tinyurl.com/UWECBLISS>

Information will also be available on our [Nursing Alumni and Community Partners Page](#).

New College of Nursing Mission, Vision, and Values

In September 2025, the College of Nursing adopted new mission and vision statements, along with a new set of core values. Much of the Spring 2025 semester was devoted to determining our core values, which provided a foundation for the creation of the mission and vision statements. All members of the College were involved in their development. For 2026, we are focusing on implementing two to three goals to promote our core value of community. Our new mission, vision, and value statements are as follows:

Mission Statement:

The College of Nursing advances the discipline through excellence in education, research, practice, and service. Guided by our core values, we foster a holistic environment that develops competent and compassionate nurses prepared to lead, promote health, and improve health outcomes across populations and the lifespan.

Vision Statement:

The College of Nursing envisions a future where our faculty, staff, students, and graduates lead with integrity, curiosity, and compassion to transform health care and advance health for all. We strive to be a national leader in nursing education, research, and practice—empowering a broad community of faculty, staff, students, and graduates to flourish in a culture of well-being, collaboration, and lifelong learning. Through innovation and meaningful partnerships, we will shape the future of nursing and promote the health of all communities we serve.

Core Values:

Community

Together, we grow and develop.

We create strong, inclusive relationships across our college, university, local and global communities—built on respect, collaboration, and shared purpose.

Integrity

Doing what is right.

We lead with honesty, professionalism, and accountability—upholding trust in every aspect of education, research, and care of self and others.

Curiosity

For the love of learning.

We inspire lifelong learning, critical thinking, innovation, and scholarship—empowering nurses to adapt and lead in a changing world.

Well-being

Caring for the whole person.

We support the mental/emotional, physical, and spiritual health of our students, faculty, staff, and communities—knowing well-being is essential to learning, service, research, and care of self and others.

End of the Marshfield Site Distance Education Program

May 16, 2026 was a day of joy as well as sadness. Our last cohort from the Marshfield Site, consisting of three undergraduate students, graduated with Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degrees (see photo of three graduates in regalia at the Sonnentag Center, next page). Including them, 876 individuals have earned their degrees from UW-Eau Claire through the distance education site.

The closing of the Marshfield Site follows the difficult decision made by Marshfield Clinic Health System (MCHS) in Spring 2024 to phase out the program. Subsequently, in July 2024, MCHS and Sanford Health announced an intent to combine and create an integrated health system; the merger was finalized on January 2, 2025.



Our original distance education site in Marshfield was established in partnership with Saint Joseph's Hospital in the fall of 1986, as the Hospital phased out its diploma program. The distance education program was designed to help place-bound students in central Wisconsin earn their baccalaureate degrees in Nursing with the goal of retaining them as registered nurses in the area.

For more than thirty years we were housed in the South Building of the Hospital (see photo, above), which provided funding for faculty and staff, classroom, skills laboratory, and office space, and other resources (see Room 111 classroom circa 2000, top right). Ownership of the Hospital changed over the years, including by Ascension and its subsidiary, Ministry Health Care. In July 2017, MCHS finalized the purchase

of Ministry Saint Joseph's Hospital and renamed it the Marshfield Medical Center. Owing to the age of the South Building, we moved from that location to the Helen Connor Laird Fine Arts Building on the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point at Marshfield campus in May 2021. The South Building was subsequently demolished in December 2021. With the relocation, MCHS leased the campus space and continued to support our program.



Throughout the years, classes were taught by faculty located at the Marshfield Site and at the main Eau Claire campus. Initially they used an Optel audiographics system that relied on telephone lines and required students and faculty to utilize microphones to hear each other; however, they were not able to see each other. Visuals were generally limited to transmissions of computer graphic images.

Beginning around 1995, major technological advancements occurred as the distance education rooms in Eau Claire and in Marshfield were upgraded with interactive video (ITV) systems. Finally, students and faculty were able to see each other on large view screens, in addition to projected PowerPoint slides,



document camera materials, and videos (see photo, above and to the right, of Marshfield Site distance education classroom, Room 111, May 2008; and photo, below, of students in the hall, 2020). Further changes in the technologies occurred as we transitioned to using Zoom in the classrooms, in the wake of the pandemic.



The first cohort of students at the distance education site was admitted in 1987 and started taking nursing courses in 1987-1988 with 18 students graduating in May 1990. Prerequisite and general education courses were completed at other universities, including the Universities of Wisconsin campuses in Marshfield, Wausau, Stevens Point, and even Eau Claire. From the initial start of the program through 2006, the sophomore students were required to come to the Eau Claire campus for one summer to complete a fundamentals course and clinical.

For two decades, up through about 2007, we admitted approximately 24 students once per year to the Marshfield Site. Beginning in 2008, grant funding enabled us to begin accepting 16 students each semester for a total of 32 students per year. This meant all the nursing courses were now offered at the Marshfield Site every semester, rather than just once per year. However, by 2019, interest in applying to the distance education site had declined.

With the closure, Dean Kristen Abbott-Anderson reflected on the innovations that supported connections between the Eau Claire and Marshfield sites. Well before technology caught up with connecting distant sites, this partnership demonstrated a spirit of finding solutions to novel challenges. The Dean stated, "I firmly believe that the openness to innovation

and identifying new pathways to nursing education through the Marshfield Distance Education Site continues to inspire us to think creatively as we face new challenges in nursing education. For instance, how can we creatively address pinch-points in clinical experience spaces? The Marshfield Site partnership helps us to think outside of our preconceived boxes. I will forever be grateful to the Marshfield Site partnership for inspiring us to be creative."

Students and faculty and staff have many fond memories of their experiences at the Marshfield Site. The final May 2026 class of three students, **Brittany Heiman, Zoey Neumann, and Eliana Kanitz** (see photo, below), shared their



thoughts. With only the three of them, they got to know each other and their instructors quite well, as there was "never much opportunity to hide in the background, which challenged each of us to grow in confidence and participation." It "helped shape us not only as nursing students, but as future nurses." They acknowledged that "being in Marshfield gave us a unique appreciation for nursing in smaller communities and the importance of local healthcare education. With such a small group, every class, clinical day, and milestone felt memorable in its own way. As the final Marshfield cohort, we often recognized how special it was to be part of a campus with such a meaningful history, and we will always

appreciate being part of its final chapter.” They expressed gratitude to the faculty and staff who “encouraged us, challenged us, and helped prepare us for the next step in our careers.”

Dakota Brorson (class of May 2020) related that the Marshfield Site, including the instructors and fellow students, was “a huge part of our lives.” She recalled how she and her classmates



were quite nervous about their initial clinicals. At first, as they were yet too afraid to ask their instructors but already being very close, they often relied on each other for questions. Later, when their class was asked about possibly needing to switch their clinical days and times around, as a group, they were more than willing to adjust to make the experiences happen—“it showed how we were all willing to work together.” Thinking highly of the instructors, Ms. Brorson admitted to still following some of them on Facebook.

In addition to regularly spending long hours studying at the Marshfield Clinic George E. Magnin Medical Library and at people’s houses, Ms. Brorson fondly remembered going out every Thursday night to a local restaurant for sushi or else to the El Mezcal restaurant. Like many of her peers, she was active in the Eau Claire Student Nurses Association (ECSNA) at the Marshfield Site. Favorite activities included a band-aid drive and cookie decorating, as well as attending a weekend Wisconsin Student Nurses Association 70th Anniversary conference held at the Wilderness Resort in Wisconsin Dells, February 2019, along with their ECSNA adviser, Ms. Suzanne Voros (see photo, above).

Daine Riggins, Class of December 2022, was likewise saddened to hear about the closure of

the Marshfield Site but is thankful for the opportunities it provided. “I had great clinical experiences, got to learn in smaller class sizes, made great friends and had wonderful professors, and I was able to complete my nursing degree in a timely manner.” While a



student at the Marshfield Site, she was able to participate in a clinical immersion experience at the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota, along with peers from the Eau Claire campus (see photo, above, of students with an air ambulance at the Reservation).

Dr. Marie Walsh, Assistant Professor, taught with us at the Marshfield Site since January 2020, and was the Clinical Learning Center Coordinator there for part of that time. She will continue as a tenure-track faculty member at UW-Eau Claire following the Marshfield Site closure but acknowledged she is in for a much



longer commute to work. One of her commutes entailed transporting manikins from Marshfield to Eau Claire in her convertible on May 8, 2026 (see photo, above).

Dr. Walsh shared, "But more than the change in geography, I am reflecting on the incredible community that has defined this site for so long. Marshfield has always been a special place to grow. Because we were a smaller site, there was a unique closeness here, a sense of family that I've been so proud to be a part of. I've had a front-row seat to each student's journey, watching them move from those first clinical jitters to the day they were pinned and headed out into the field." Dr. Walsh believes "the impact our students make as nurses continues every single day. It has been a privilege to support everyone over the last five and a half years, and I look forward to seeing all the ways everyone continues to lead and serve in our communities."

Dr. Rachel Merkel, Nursing Department Co-Chair and Professor, was the Marshfield Site Coordinator, later Director, for 11 years from 2015 to 2026. She will be continuing at the Eau Claire campus in her current Department of Nursing Co-Chair role, a position she has held since 2023. She also reflected on her nearly twenty years with the Marshfield Site campus. "Starting out as a newer educator at the Marshfield Site back in 2007 was a unique opportunity in that we were a close-knit faculty group, often relying upon one another. We developed so many positive teaching

experiences within the community that were possible with the smaller cohort sizes. It was a small program with a big impact. The camaraderie and uniqueness that was the 'Marshfield Site' is something our graduates and faculty will always carry with them."

As a final remembrance and honoring of our four decades with the Marshfield Site, current and past nursing faculty and staff from both the Marshfield Site and Eau Claire campus gathered to reminisce at a local restaurant in Marshfield on May 18, 2026 (see photo, below). We are grateful for our years with Marshfield Clinic Health System and will continue to partner with them for clinical learning opportunities in Marshfield, Eau Claire, and other communities.



Remembering Dr. Sandra Sweeney



Dr. Sandra S. Sweeney, Professor Emerita, passed away at the age of 83 on December 3, 2024 in Wakefield, Rhode Island, near her brother and sister-in-law. Dr. Sweeney had been living in Panama

City Beach, Florida, following her retirement from UW-Eau Claire.

Dr. Sweeney taught with us from 1982-1997 and retired as a professor in the Department of

Nursing Systems. Her teaching range encompassed undergraduate and graduate courses, including the sophomore nursing course, "Professional Dimensions of Nursing," as well as master's degree courses pertaining to "Research Design and Methodology," "Leadership in Nursing," "Issues in Nursing," and "Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations of Nursing," among others.

Born in Joliet, Illinois, Dr. Sweeney grew up in Bloomington, Illinois when her father relocated there for his work during World War II. She earned a diploma in Nursing from Mercy Hospital School of Nursing in Davenport, Iowa, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from Saint Ambrose College in Davenport, and Master

of Arts and PhD degrees from the University of Iowa.



Dr. Sweeney retired as a Colonel in the Army Nurse Corps, United States Army Reserve (USAR). She served as Chief Nurse, 5501st United States Army Hospital

with headquarters at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. She demonstrated exemplary leadership and mentored many soldiers under her command. As she once noted, being a reserve officer in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) enabled her to “combine hands on care with a variety of administrative duties.” Dr. Sweeney also had the distinction of being a member of the ANC advisory council to the Chief of Staff and Senior advisor in the Office of the Surgeon General (OSG).

Prior to teaching at UW-Eau Claire, Dr. Sweeney held academic positions at the University of Iowa and the Mennonite Hospital School of Nursing in Bloomington, Illinois. Additionally, she had assumed various nursing positions in Davenport, Iowa; Sweden, Maine; Bloomington-Normal, Illinois; Chicago; Fort Pierce, Florida; and Westerly, Rhode Island.

She published numerous book chapters and journal articles and gave presentations on topics such as, “Does Nursing have the Power to Change the Health Care System?”, the Loomis and Wood Model, and “Developing the Nurse

Executive” for the U.S. Army. She was a coeditor on the book, *The Loomis/Wood Model: Applying Theory to Nursing Education, Research, and Practice*.

Consistent with her scholarly accomplishments, Dr. Sweeney served as the Assistant Dean for University Research at UW-Eau Claire from 1984-1987. In recognition of her work, she received the inaugural Suzanne Van Ort Award for Faculty Creativity and Scholarliness from the School of Nursing in 1985.

Dr. Sweeney had many hobbies and interests. She was an accomplished golfer, an avid photographer, made hooked rugs, and created porcelain dolls of people, including family members. She also was an incredible woodworker who used a lathe to fashion bowls in her working studio. She took pleasure in showing her woodwork at local fairs.

She particularly enjoyed traveling with her friend and former UW-Eau Claire colleague, Dr. Patricia Ostmo, to places such as Africa, the Netherlands, Ireland, Tahiti, the Caribbean, and throughout Europe. She took many photos by which to remember these travels.

Her family described her as a “fun-loving extrovert with many friends” who loved to cook and entertain. She was very active in her Catholic parish and mentored newly arrived immigrant families from Africa and Vietnam who had joined her parish in Florida. Dr. Sweeney led a rich life and offered much to generations of students, her communities, the nursing profession, and her country. Deep condolences are extended to her family and friends.

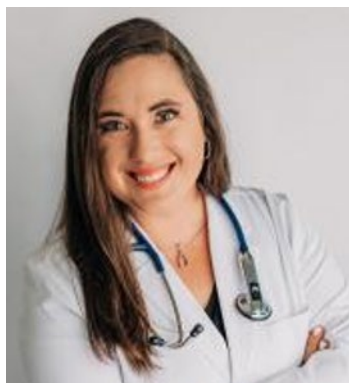
Transitions and New Opportunities

The 2025-2026 academic year was met with a few members of the College of Nursing retiring or leaving. We miss them and encourage them to stay connected with us.

Dr. Melissa (Mel) Skoff, Assistant Professor, returned full time to clinical practice and her

entrepreneurial interests in January 2026, following the Fall 2025 semester. As an example of her entrepreneurship, in February 2026, Dr. Skoff self-published on Amazon, *Before I'm Gone: The Lasting Legacy Planner: An End-of-Life Organizer for Important Information, Final Wishes, Documents, and Everything Your Loved*

Ones Need to Know. Additionally, she is working as a money coach, having created Money Masterminds, a group coaching platform.



Dr. Skoff originally joined the College in January 2023 and primarily taught in the graduate program. While teaching, she engaged in telemedicine to maintain her

nurse practitioner clinical practice and provided national webinars in which she presented on advanced practice board examination preparation. Dr. Skoff earned Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Doctor of Nursing Practice degrees from St. Scholastica. She previously was an Assistant Professor at St. Scholastica and a nurse practitioner in Rochester, MN and Spooner, WI.

While at UW-Eau Claire, Dr. Skoff was the recipient, along with two students, of a Gritzmacher Science Education Fellowship in 2024 through the UW-Eau Claire Foundation for their project, *Advance Care Planning Facilitation among Prelicensure Nursing Students*. She received additional funding through the Medical College of Wisconsin and the Nurses Foundation of Wisconsin related to her advance care planning interests. A second Gritzmacher Science Education Fellowship was awarded in 2025 pertaining to palliative care education in nurse practitioner programs. Dr. Skoff is looking forward to having more time for her family and her various entrepreneurial interests.

Ms. Theresa (Tess) Curtis, Dean's Assistant, retired on March 12, 2026. She had been in her role since starting at UW-Eau Claire in October 2023. Ms. Curtis is an alum of UW-Eau Claire and previously worked at the Chippewa Valley Technical College, the



Eau Claire Area School District, and the Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection. Ms. Curtis excelled at organizing events, including the Mary C. and Fred Bliss Contemporary Nursing Lectureship and the Nursing Convocation (pinning) ceremony. She also mastered the challenge of assembling a committee of College of Nursing volunteers to review and award the many generous scholarships available to deserving students.

With retirement, Ms. Curtis plans to watch her grandson and "hang out" with her "other grandma friends on playdates."

Ms. Patricia (Patty) McGregor, Department Assistant, retired on March 12, 2026, after eight years of working for the College, having started in March 2018. She provided support for the nursing graduate programs as well as the College in general. Ms. McGregor is an alum of UW-Eau Claire and previously was the registrar and director of admissions at UW Colleges and was the registrar at Marion University in Fond du Lac and Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

Her organizational talents and registrar knowledge and expertise were invaluable. She provided vital assistance to both students and faculty and staff as she anticipated and predicted their requests and proactively attended to details.

With retirement, Ms. McGregor plans to travel "wherever the spirit" moves her, including across the U.S. as well as Europe. A talented master knitter, she enjoys knitting tours as part of her travels. We hope the spirit keeps moving her to a retirement filled with much enjoyment!

Mr. Andrew (Andy) Hanson, Information Systems Coordinator, moved on to other



opportunities following the spring 2026 semester, upon the graduation of our last students at the Marshfield Site distance education program. He originally started in

the College in March 2017 as our Technology Specialist/Distance Education Coordinator and transitioned to the titles of Information Systems Coordinator and Building Coordinator. A primary responsibility was providing support to faculty, staff, and students in the smooth running of our distance education technologies.

Mr. Hanson has a Master of Arts in History degree from UW-Eau Claire and worked as a program and technology support associate in the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at UW-Eau Claire prior to his employment with the College. While with our College, he received the Dean's Award for Administrative Professional Excellence in 2023.

A musically and multi-talented singer, songwriter, and guitarist, in 2024 he released a solo album, *Roots*, a collection of ten folk and Americana songs he wrote. Additionally, he recently released a music video and song, *Gravity*.

Welcomes and New Appointments

This past 2025-2026 academic year brought us several new additions to the College. **Dr. Mary McMahon Bullis**, Assistant Professor, started in August 2025. She earned a PhD in Nursing from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and a Master of Arts degree with a dual concentration in Nursing Education and Healthcare Leadership and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from Bethel University in St. Paul. She received an Associate of Science in Nursing degree from Southern University in Collegedale, Tennessee. Dr. McMahon Bullis has held a number of practice positions, including as an RN care coordinator in cardiology, an electrophysiology nurse clinician, and a critical care nurse, in addition to serving in the Navy.

In Fall, other new additions were **Mr. James Kniola**, Clinical Assistant Professor, and **Dr. Brianna Zajda**, Clinical Instructor. **Ms. Kara Todd**, Clinical Instructor, joined the College for the Spring 2026 semester. **Ms. Rose Raleigh**, Clinical Learning Center Associate Director, began part-time in her role in May 2025 and

Ms. Jeanne Lewandowski, Clinical Instructor, returned to clinical practice and graduate school following the Spring 2026 semester. Ms.



Lewandowski began teaching with us in Fall 2023, primarily in junior and senior level classes. She will be going on to earn a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree with a focus on Leadership Ethics at Viterbo University; she also

has accepted a position in Professional Development at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System. Ms. Lewandowski is a retired Navy Captain with a Master of Arts in Political Science and Government degree from the U.S. Naval War College and a Master of Science in Nursing degree from the University of Phoenix.

transitioned to full time in Fall 2025. **Ms. Katie Miles** began as the new Dean's Assistant on June 8, 2026.

Dr. Miriam Sward and **Dr. Rachel Zimmer** transitioned from Clinical Assistant Professor positions to tenure-track Assistant Professor roles for Fall 2025. Dr. Sward earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree from Frontier Nursing University in Kentucky, a Master's degree in Health Informatics and Information Management from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, a Post-master's Certificate in Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a Master of Science in Nursing degree from Ball State University in Indiana, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from UW-Eau Claire, and an Associate Degree in Nursing from Florida Community College in Jacksonville, Florida. Dr. Sward currently is a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP). Dr. Zimmer earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing

degree through UW-Eau Claire. She has many years of nursing practice experience in an area hospital.

Ms. Kaylan Petrie, the former administrative coordinator at the Marshfield Site, assumed the new title of Strategic Engagement Specialist on May 18, 2026.

Dr. Catherine Wildenberg, Clinical Assistant Professor, accepted a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor, starting Fall 2026, following the completion of her PhD degree from Villanova University in May 2026. She joined our College in July 2018 as our Prelicensure Academic Success Coordinator and also taught undergraduate courses. Dr.

Wildenberg earned a Master of Science in Nursing degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing Degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The title of her dissertation was, *Community Health Nurses' Experiences of, and Perceived Barriers and Facilitators to, Screening Non-Birthing Parents for Perinatal Depression*.

Ms. Kirsten Dieckman, Clinical Assistant Professor, has been appointed as the Prelicensure Academic Success Coordinator, starting with the 2026-2027 academic year. This appointment follows the transition of Dr. Catherine Wildenberg to an assistant professor position.

2025 Nursing Alumni Homecoming Breakfast

In honor of the 60th anniversary of our Nursing Program, a Nursing Alumni Breakfast was held during Homecoming on October 4, 2025 (see photo, center). Under the leadership of Dean Marguerite Coffman, in Fall 1965, the first nursing course, N50 Nursing and the Social Order, was taught to sophomore nursing students.

To prepare for the anniversary, alums were asked to share their memories, photos, and mementos from their student days. Using these materials, a photo slide show for the breakfast and a special July 2025 Nursing Alumni Newsletter addendum, *A Look into our Past and Present: 60 Years of Student Memories*, were created by the associate dean. The Newsletter was e-mailed to alums (for whom we have contact information).

A few artifacts were placed on display during the breakfast, including a navy blue uniform and

cap (unstarched and missing the blue ribbon) from the 1980s, a leather community health

bag, newspaper clippings pertaining to the first nursing graduation, and a copy of an admission acceptance letter signed by Dean Marguerite Coffman in 1966 (see photo, below).

Additional artifacts are welcome—we are appreciative of the recent Merck Manuals and starched nursing cap (complete with blue



ribbon) donated by Ms. Marcia (Zuehlke) Steffen, class of 1969.

Please contact Dr. Debra Jansen, Associate Dean, at jansenda@uwec.edu if you would like an electronic copy of the newsletter or have additional memories or artifacts to share.

Please plan to attend the next Nursing Alumni Homecoming Breakfast scheduled for Saturday October 3, 2026. See this [link](#) or url <https://tinyurl.com/nursing-alumni> for our Nursing Alumni and Community Partners Page for more details and registration payment and College of Nursing T-shirt ordering information. Nursing alumni, faculty and staff, emeriti, family, and friends are invited.

2025 Mary C. and Fred Bliss Contemporary Nursing Lectureship



On October 23-24, 2025, the second annual Mary C. and Fred Bliss Contemporary Nursing Lectureship was held on campus. Dr. Maxim Topaz, PhD, MA, RN, FAAN, FACMI, FIAHSI, Elizabeth Standish Gill Associate Professor of Nursing at Columbia University Irving

Medical Center School of Nursing in New York City, provided a keynote address, *Using Artificial Intelligence to Advance Nursing and Health: Tools, Pitfalls, and Practical Workflow*.

Additionally, as part of an undergraduate class, he gave an interactive presentation focused on the students, *AI and Nursing: Let's Talk about What's Really Happening* (see photo, below, of students, along with a few faculty members, surrounding Dr. Topaz in the center). He also talked with students and faculty as he attended a student research poster session.

Faculty, staff, students, alums, community/clinical partners, and members of the public scheduled one-on-one consultation time with Dr. Topaz during the visit. His stay at UW-Eau Claire concluded with a breakfast featuring an *AI and Nursing Informatics Panel* that included Dr. Topaz, Dr. Jeanette Olson, Nursing Professor at UW-Eau Claire, and Mr. Daniel Tainter, a Clinical Nurse Manager at Mayo Clinic Health System.

Mary C. and Fred Bliss, longtime donors to the College, created the lectureship to support innovative thinking in nursing. The vision is to host an expert in a contemporary nursing related area to enhance knowledge, understanding, and application of a significant topic or issue. Ms. Mary Campbell Bliss is a 1978 alum of the undergraduate nursing program.

Be sure to save the date for the 2026 Lectureship scheduled for October 22-23, 2026 on campus. Dr. Oriana Beaudet, DNP, RN, FAAN, Vice President of Nursing Innovation for the American Nurses Association Enterprise





(ANAE), will be providing a keynote address on *Nursing Innovation in Uncertain Times* on Thursday October 22, 2026. She holds a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree in Health Innovation

and Leadership from the University of Minnesota. More details and registration information will be coming in the future and can be found at this [link](#) or at this url: <https://tinyurl.com/UWECBLISS>

Honors, Recognitions, Awards, and Notable News

We are proud to share the excellence demonstrated by the students, faculty, and staff of the College of Nursing and by our alums. Highlights of many who were recognized this past year are described below.

Four promotions were announced at the August 2025 College meeting, including **Dr. Mohammad Alasagheirin, Dr. Jeanette Olsen, Dr. Lisa Schiller, and Dr. Arin VanWormer** from Associate Professor to Professor (see photo, below, of the College faculty and staff taken at the August 28, 2025 College opening meeting held at the Florian Gardens in Eau Claire).

At the annual University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Blugold Breakfast held on August 19, 2025, **Dr. Lisa Schiller**, Professor, Department of Nursing Co-Chair and Nursing Graduate Programs Director, was awarded the Faculty



Excellence in Service Award. A member of the faculty since 2009, the award was in recognition of her service to the Chippewa Valley Free Clinic (Board of Directors President), the

Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center, the International Society for Agricultural Health and Safety Committee, and the Midwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety. She has and continues to play an important role in the Compañeros en Salud y Seguridad/Partners in Health and Safety Program. Through the Program, senior nursing students engage in



domestic intercultural immersion experiences with Latinx immigrant dairy farm workers in the local surrounding counties.

Senior student **Brandon Voelker** (May 2026 graduate) and **Dr. Melissa Skoff**, Assistant Professor, received a Gritzmacher Science Education Fellowship in October 2025 from the UW-Eau Claire Foundation for their science outreach project, *ELNEC in Action: A Phased Approach to Embedding Palliative Care Education in NP Programs*. The fellowship provided small stipends and funds to support carrying out their project.

Brandon Voelker, Hannah Berndt, and Aspen Mormon, second semester senior undergraduate students who subsequently graduated in May, attended the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)



Student Policy Summit in Washington, D.C., March 30-31st (see photo, above, with Dean Kristin Abbott-Anderson). For the first day of the conference, undergraduate and graduate students from across the country learned about federal policy and professional advocacy. The second day enabled the students with deans to meet with congressional representatives and staff members to advocate support for policies that address access to care, including in rural and underserved communities, nursing education, and workforce shortages and conditions, among other concerns of nurses.

On April 23, 2026, two Nursing faculty members received Nursing university fellowships. These are three-year fellowships that include stipends to be used for expenses such as travel, scholarship, course overload or

release, and student payments. **Dr. Rachel Pierce**, Assistant Professor, was awarded the Mary E. Granger Nursing University Fellowship (see photo, immediately below). Dr. Pierce,



along with Dr. Rachel Zimmer, is using the funding to advance a national research initiative examining oral contraceptive use access for patients hospitalized in behavioral

health. **Dr. Meg Lagunas**, Director of the Clinical Learning Center and Associate Professor, was recognized with the Mary E. Granger Mid-Career Nursing University Fellowship (see photo to the right). Dr. Lagunas will use the funding for professional development centering on updated simulation education and research practices, as well as leadership.



The **RN-vironmentalists**, a group of UW-Eau Claire Nursing faculty and staff and family members, participated in the 18th Annual Amazing Eau Claire Clean-Up held on Saturday, April 25, 2026. They joined volunteers to help



pick up litter across the city in parks, playgrounds, trails, and downtown areas (see

photo, above). The event was organized by the Eau Claire Parks, Recreation, & Forestry Department and marked the commitment by the College to promote community, one of its core values.

Several other faculty and instructional and professional academic staff members were honored with awards from the College at the May 14, 2026 College meeting. **Dr. Meg Lagunas** received the Ihle Family Award for Caring; **Dr. Charlotte Sortedahl** the Suzanne Van Ort Award for Faculty Creativity and Scholarliness; **Dr. Norah Airth-Kindree** the Patricia M. Ostmo Award for Faculty and Academic Staff Excellence in Clinical Instruction; **Dr. Jeanette Olsen** the Rita Kisting Sparks Faculty Service Award; **Dr. Stephanie Hill** the CeCelia Zorn Exemplary Teaching Award; **Ms. Melissa Boellaard** the Dean's Award for Administrative Professional Excellence; **Dr. Jeanette Olsen** the Nursing Faculty Development Fund for Professional Service Award; and **Ms. Heather Iverson** the Colleen and Tom Nevins College of Nursing Faculty Development and Scholarship Award. **Ms. Heather Iverson** also subsequently received the inaugural Joan Stehle Werner Educational Advancement Award intended to support a nursing faculty or instructional academic staff member who is pursuing a graduate degree; she is currently enrolled in a post-master's Doctor of Nursing practice program.



Dr. Meg Lagunas, Director of the Clinical Learning Center and Associate Professor of Nursing, was appointed as a Health Education Initiative Faculty Fellow, along with Dr. Tom Sather, Professor of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences at UW-

Eau Claire. The fellows will work with Dr. Carmen Manning, Special Assistant to the Chancellor for Healthcare Education and Dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences, and Ms. Jackie Nevarez, Project Coordinator. They are charged with advancing the health and healthcare priorities outlined in the University's

Vision 2030 Strategic Plan. The fellowships are for two years and commenced this summer 2026.



Dr. Katelyn Leggio, Assistant Professor in Nursing, was selected for the Midwest LEADRS (Leading, Empowering, and Advancing Diverse Researchers for Social Determinants of Health) Fellowship Program. This eight-

month NIH-funded fellowship is being offered by the University of Indiana School of Nursing and entails an immersive week of training in Indianapolis in August 2026. A goal is to equip nurse scientists to carry out and evaluate research that speaks to the social determinants of health, as a means of improving health.

Dr. Meg Lagunas, Director of the Clinical Learning Center and Associate Professor in Nursing, and Dr. Rahul Gomes, Department Chair and Associate Professor in Computer Science and Ramsey Mayo Research Professor, have been awarded, along with the Clinical Learning Center team, a Universities of Wisconsin Ignite Grant for the 2026-2027 academic year. Their proposal, *AI Character Integration in Immersive Reality Room for Simulation*, represents a collaboration between the departments for technology innovation in teaching.



Dr. Barbara (Gullicksrud) Haas, BSN Class of 1975, was named Provost at the University of Texas at Tyler in August 2025. She previously was Dean of the School of Nursing and had been faculty there since 1992. Dr. Haas earned a PhD in nursing from

the University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree in nursing from Marquette University. The School of Nursing grew, becoming the third

largest in Texas, under her leadership as dean. She was the recipient of a \$2.18 million grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to educate, retain, and grow nursing faculty and students.

Dr. Omid Razmpour, BSN Class of May 2020, graduated with a PhD in Nursing from the Neil Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing and an MBA from the Goizueta Business School at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. While in graduate school, he received the Marion Luther Brittain Award,



Emory University's highest student award, for his advocacy work in improving working conditions for nurses. He was influenced by his personal experience with burnout and trauma while working as a new ICU nurse during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a means of encouraging hospitals to better support nurses, he developed the Retention, Evaluation and Turnover Analysis for the Investment in Nursing (RETAIN) Framework to quantify the financial and operational impacts of nurse turnover. Following the adoption of the pilot of the RETAIN Framework, turnover of nurses dropped by 58% at Emory Healthcare. Besides

assisting bedside nurses, Dr. Razmpour is hoping his example will encourage other students and alums to consider earning a PhD in Nursing. He currently has a year-long visiting PhD fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) School of Management.

Dr. Kathleen (Welle) Clark, BSN Class of 2002, will be inducted into the American Academy of Nursing this October 2026 in Washington, DC, on top of also being promoted to full professor at Augsburg University in Minneapolis this Fall. On June 1, 2026, she became the Director of the Sabo Center for Democracy and



Citizenship, while continuing as the Executive Director of the Augsburg Health Commons. Dr. Clark previously was the Chair of the Nursing Department at Augsburg University where she has been teaching since 2009. Recent past awards and distinctions in 2025 included the Barbara A. Holland Scholar-Administrator Award from the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, participating in the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's Elevating Leaders in Academic Nursing (ELAN) fellowship program, and being selected by the Minnesota Association of Registered Nurses for an American Nurses Advocacy Institute fellowship.

Eau Claire Student Nurses Association

Members of the Eau Claire Student Nurses Association (ECSNA), with Dr. Gail Hanson Brenner as their faculty adviser, were busy helping fellow students and their communities this past academic year. Examples of some of their activities included the following: They



made tie blankets and cards of encouragement for patients at the Cancer Center at the Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire (see photo, to the left) and created handmade seasonal cards for senior residents at Dove Healthcare – South Eau Claire. They also hosted numerous guest speakers, including a palliative care nurse, a flight nurse, a nurse practitioner, a labor and delivery nurse, and a new medical-surgical nurse to talk about their different areas and experiences. Other meeting sessions focused on preventing burnout in the nursing career and as a nursing student, in addition to “de-stress” meetings held prior to large pre-nursing exams. Like the Nursing faculty and staff, they also

participated in the Annual Amazing Eau Claire Clean-Up in which they joined volunteers to help pick up litter across the city in parks, playgrounds, trails, and the downtown area. Additionally, most of the ECSNA board attended

the annual Wisconsin Student Nurses' Association (WSNA) convention in Wisconsin Dells in February. We appreciate the energy and enthusiasm of the students in supporting other students, patients, residents, and the public.

Special Thanks to Clinical Agencies, Preceptors, Alumni, and Donors



We extend our gratitude to the many health care agencies, individuals, and preceptors for the wide array of rich clinical and mentorship opportunities they provided for our undergraduate and graduate students. We also appreciate our many donors who funded scholarships for our students; provided funds for our simulation laboratories, clinical experiences, and student travel; enabled clinical and/or classroom offerings in Eau Claire and in Marshfield, Duluth/Superior, St. Paul, and neighboring cities and counties; or supported our general Nursing Advancement Fund as well as faculty and staff development and recognition opportunities. ***Thank you!***

Please Update Contact Information

If your contact information has changed, please kindly update your current mailing address, phone number, email address, and job information by going to the following website:

https://uweauclaire.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_exKr7wPAaLHXdid

Please Share News, Stories, Memories

Please contact Dr. Debra Jansen, Associate Dean, if you have news, stories, memories, mementos, or information you would like to share for future newsletters or for preserving as part of our Nursing history. She can be reached at jansenda@uwec.edu.

The College of Nursing can be reached at 715-836-5287; nursing@uwec.edu.

Our College of Nursing Alumni and Community Partners Page is available at this [link](#) or url:

<https://tinyurl.com/nursing-alumni>