



April 2026

UNIVERSITY OF DUBUQUE NURSING DEPARTMENT

NURSING NEWSLETTER SPRING 2026



CONGRATULATE THE UD NURSING GRADUATING CLASS OF 2026

IN THIS ISSUE

Department Leaders Note p. 2

Graduating Seniors p. 3-8

Honors Convocation p. 9-11

In the Classroom p.12

To the Field p. 13-14

Collaboration p. 15

Conferences p. 16

Alumni Spotlight p. 16

DEPARTMENT LEADERS MESSAGE



Jackie Meyer Ph.D., RN, CNE,
Department Head, Professor of Nursing



Ashley Cleary DNP, BS, ARNP, FNP-BC
Assistant Department Head

Welcome! On behalf of Dr. Jackie Meyer, Department Head, and myself, Ashley Cleary, we are grateful for your taking the time to engage with our newsletter. We are entering a busy, celebratory time in the academic year.

In this spring issue, you will meet each of our Class of 2026 graduating seniors. They are currently completing their coursework, clinicals, and preceptorships. Each one shares their exciting career goals/plans following graduation. We celebrate their accomplishments at the pinning ceremony on May 1 and at graduation on May 2. We are grateful each has been a part of the UD Nursing family and are so proud of them. Please wish them every success as they continue their nursing journeys!

Continuing with the celebratory nature, you will find our nursing scholarship recipients who were awarded at Honors Convocation on April 14. Please extend your congratulations to these outstanding students.

A new addition to our simulation lab is highlighted! Since our last newsletter, we have acquired Victoria, a high-fidelity birth simulator. The students have practiced clinical judgement and skills with Victoria as she gives birth to her new baby girl. See inside for the baby's name!

Continuing with our program goal of facilitating service across the curriculum, our students and faculty have engaged in activities in the Dubuque region. You will see pictures of our community-centered learning experiences at Stonehill Communities and the Multicultural Family Center while reading about creating a culture of caring. Including students' own reflections on their experiences and the benefit this service-learning integration.

Speaking of learning, we have exciting opportunities for faculty and our Student Nursing Association (SNA) members who are part of the Iowa Association of Student Nurses (IANS) executive board. On April 9, UD hosted a Mini SUN Conference bringing simulation professionals from across the region to campus. At the same time, our IANS executive board members were in Houston, Texas for the National SNA Convention. We are proud to have UD well represented on the state SNA board and wish them a safe and enlightening trip.

We are grateful for the support of all the friends of UD Nursing. We wish you a fruitful spring and invite you to join us in celebrating all the students' wonderful achievements.

GRADUATING SENIORS



Hometown: Annabelle from Aurora, Illinois

Inspiration: I want to be the person who is there for those who have no one else by making lasting impacts on people's lives and giving them hope when it seems like there is none.

Career Goals: I have accepted a job at MercyOne Dubuque as a pediatric nurse. Later, I would like to explore PICU, or pediatric oncology.

Love most about being a Spartan: I have found some of my best friends at UD, and the professors are some of the best!

Advice to incoming nursing students: take nursing school day by day, because looking too far ahead can seem very overwhelming. You will get through it and succeed.



Hometown: Anthony from Stockton, California

Inspiration: During the COVID-19 pandemic, a pivotal moment changed the direction of my life. A man went into cardiac arrest, and I performed CPR. I was able to stay calm, act quickly, and focus to help in a critical time of need. It led me to pursue nursing, a career centered on caring for others, being present in high-pressure situations, and making a real difference in people's lives.

Career Goals: Begin as an RN working in an acute care setting where I can strengthen my clinical skills, build confidence, and learn from experienced nurses. I hope to be part of the Kaiser Permanente New Graduate Nurse Residency Program. Long term, to grow into a role advocating for patients, contributing meaningfully to the healthcare team, and mentoring future nurses.

Love most about being a Spartan: The sense of community and support. Coming to Dubuque from California without family nearby was challenging. Through wrestling and the nursing program, the Spartan community gave me a place to feel supported, motivated, and accountable. Being a Spartan means pushing yourself to be better every day, while knowing you are part of something bigger than yourself.

Advice to incoming nursing students: Stay disciplined, ask questions, and take care of your mental health. Nursing school is demanding. Lean on your peers, stay organized, and remember why you chose this path. It makes all the difference. Don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone. Those challenging moments are where the most growth happens.



GRADUATING SENIORS



Hometown: Ashley from Dixon, Illinois

Inspiration: I have always wanted to help others, and nursing provides me an opportunity to care for people in the best and worst times of their lives. Being able to provide patients with the best care possible and doing my part to contribute to the healthcare system is a strong passion of mine.

Career Goals: Working as an RN in the emergency department and then going on for my doctor of nursing practice.

Love most about being a Spartan: Consistently feeling that I am cared for and that I always have a place where I belong.

Advice to incoming nursing students: Take a deep breath, try different ways to study that work for you, and take some time to care for yourself!!

"Nursing students, your dedication today shapes the health of tomorrow."



Hometown: Chloe from West Chicago, Illinois

Inspiration: I've always been interested in medicine, and I realized I wanted to be a nurse when I saw how much it mattered to really be there for people. My mom, who's been an educator her whole life, showed me what it looks like to make others feel seen and supported. Nursing felt like the path where I could do the same, using science and compassion to help people through some of their hardest moments.

Career Goals: To move back to the Chicagoland area and work in pediatric psychiatric nursing. Mental healthcare is where my heart is, and I'm committed to making sure kids and adolescents get the support and compassion they deserve.

Love most about being a Spartan: The people. I've met lifelong friends at UD. And I've always felt genuinely supported by the staff and my professors. UD has given me relationships and mentorship that I know will last far beyond graduation.

Advice to incoming nursing students: Enjoy the journey, even when it feels overwhelming because it goes by so quickly. Nursing school can feel overwhelming at first, but you grow so much along the way. Remember that learning is lifelong and you're not expected to know everything right away. Stay curious, stay teachable, and give yourself grace.

GRADUATING SENIORS



Hometown: Lizzie from LaPorte City, Iowa

Inspiration: When I was young, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. Because of this, I was exposed to healthcare at a young age. Seeing what those nurses were able to do for not only my mom, but my family in that time inspired me to be a nurse. I want to help, support, and care for others the same way the nurses did for my family.

Career Goals: After graduating, I am moving to Indiana where I plan to work in an emergency department (ED)! I would love to continue my career being a travel nurse in the ED!

Love most about being a Spartan: I love the community! Small class sizes allow you to become close with your classmates and professors. I couldn't imagine spending everyday with anyone else.

Advice to incoming nursing students: Lean on your classmates. Nursing school is tough and nobody understands what you're going through more than them! They will be your cheerleaders and your best friends!



Hometown: Jadeyn from Rockford, Illinois

Inspiration: I want to be present for people during some of the most challenging moments of their lives and provide them with compassionate care.

Career Goals: After I graduate, I plan on moving back to Rockford, Illinois to work as a pediatric nurse.

Love most about being a Spartan: My favorite thing about being a Spartan is the community. The University of Dubuque brought me some of my best friends!

Advice to incoming nursing students: Be sure to find your people! Having a good group of friends in nursing school will make it more enjoyable and give you a group of people to study with as well.



GRADUATING SENIORS



Hometown: Kianna from Norwalk, Iowa
Inspiration: My family NP when I was a kid made me realize I wanted a job in healthcare. Ever since then it's become more obvious that I was made to be a nurse.
Career Goals: I want to be an ICU nurse!
Love most about being a Spartan: I am able to earn a difficult degree while being an athlete! It's so important to have hobbies outside of nursing.
Advice to incoming nursing students: Try to get a job as a CNA in a hospital setting! It will help so much with getting exposure to disorders, medications, and learning how to talk to patients.



Hometown: Kyla from Ladora, Iowa
Inspiration: I have always had a passion for helping others. I enrolled in the CNA program at my high school and fell in love with healthcare right away. Making a difference in other's lives was invaluable to me.
Career Goals: Following graduation, I accepted a role in the Emergency Department at UnityPoint Health-Allen Hospital, Waterloo, IA. I am so excited to start this position especially because my preceptorship is in this same location. Additionally, I have been accepted into graduate school at Allen College, to pursue a family nurse practitioner license.
Love most about being a Spartan: The connections made with our professors and other students. Coming from a small town with small class sizes, I was nervous about the larger campus life. Quickly, I learned that every professor makes you feel seen and heard. Friendships I have made at UD with fellow student nurses will last a lifetime.
Advice to incoming nursing students: Nursing school can feel overwhelming and hectic; all the emotions you can imagine. Remember your purpose and motivation for becoming a nurse. This will guide you on those tough days. Find those who you can lean on to get you through. Every little milestone in the program gives you your sense of purpose, and the impact you have on others is huge. Also, slow down and have fun, celebrate those little wins, and good vibes always.

GRADUATING SENIORS



Hometown: Logan from Des Moines, Iowa

Inspiration: From my family of caregivers. Taking care of people has always felt like a natural part of who I am. I love being there to celebrate the tiny victories with patients and watching them progress toward healing. Supporting someone through the toughest moments in their life with compassion and grit is what makes nursing feel like where I am meant to be.

Career Goals: After graduation, I plan to move back to Des Moines and work at UnityPoint Health - Blank Children's Hospital. Eventually, I would like to earn a DNP and work as a nurse practitioner.

Love most about being a Spartan: The campus community and the small class sizes that allow us to get to know our professors and classmates on a more personal level.

Advice to incoming nursing students:

There are so many things I could say, here are my top three:

1. Get a planner, it will be your best friend.
2. Find your people and hold onto them. They will get you through the hard times and celebrate the good times.
3. Talk to your professors, whether it be for a test review or just wanting some candy, they are always in your corner.



Hometown: Mary Sarah from Asbury, Iowa. Originally, from Uganda East-Africa.

Inspiration: A deep desire to serve others during moments of illness and vulnerability. My calling is rooted in faith and purpose, guided by Galatians 6:9 and by Florence Nightingale. Her dedication to service, discipline, and compassionate care affirmed my decision to pursue nursing as both a profession and a calling.

Career Goals: Begin as an RN in med-surg and health care informatics, to strengthen my clinical competence and provide holistic, patient-centered care. Long term, I hope to pursue advanced education, specializing in informatics to improve patient outcomes and serve underserved populations.

Love most about being a Spartan: The strong sense of community, faith-based support, and academic excellence. Faculty/staff are deeply invested in student success; the collaborative environment has challenged me to grow personally and professionally. Being a Spartan has taught me resilience, accountability, and servant leadership, values that align with Micah 6:8.

Advice to incoming nursing students: Remain grounded in faith, stay disciplined, and never underestimate your ability to succeed. Nursing school is demanding. Perseverance and purpose will carry you through. Surround yourself with supportive classmates, ask for help when needed, and remember that growth often comes through challenge.

GRADUATING SENIORS



Hometown: Riley from Janesville, Wisconsin
Inspiration: My Catholic faith and the desire to serve God by serving his people.
Career Goals: To someday become an ICU nurse at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center in Milwaukee.
Love most about being a Spartan: The tight knit community and close relationships I have developed, as well as the growth that is encouraged in our amazing nursing program.
Advice to incoming nursing students: You are smarter than you think and stronger than you believe! You can do it!



Hometown: Virginia from Rockford, Illinois
Inspiration: To challenge myself and make a real difference. I am naturally outgoing, and nursing gives me the chance to use that part of who I am to help people when they're feeling vulnerable.
Career Goals: After graduation I plan to move down to Fort Lauderdale, Florida and work at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital.
Love most about being a Spartan: The ability to stay involved on campus while still balancing the demands of nursing school. As a former student-athlete, I was able to work multiple jobs and participate in the Student Nursing Association at both the school and state levels. I am also so grateful for the friendships I have made this year in my small nursing class. It is a tight-knit group of amazing people who make me laugh every single day.
Advice to incoming nursing students: It is hard, but you're more capable than you realize. Do not compare yourself to anyone. You're on your own path. But lean on your classmates; they understand more than anyone.

“Nursing is the art of turning science into compassion and care into hope”

HONORS CONVOCATION

NURSING SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

We congratulate the nursing students who received recognition and nursing scholarships during the University of Dubuque's Honor Convocation on April 14, 2026. Nursing scholarships are available to the students once they enroll in the nursing major. Students must be in good standing in all current nursing courses in order to be eligible for consideration. Leadership, compassion, and professional promise are a few of the qualities the nursing faculty take into consideration when selecting recipients.

WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST SCHOLARSHIP

The William Randolph Hearst Scholarship is awarded to nursing students who maintains a 3.0 GPA and be deemed by the nursing faculty to exhibit leadership, skills, and compassion to be an excellent nurse.

2026 Recipients:

MADISON YOUNG



BLAKE BRADLEY



BROOKE BOETTNER



DR. JOHN L. BENDER NURSING SCHOLARSHIP

Dr. John L. Bender Nursing Scholarship is awarded to is a junior nursing student, who holds a 3.0 GPA and also has demonstrated service both to the nursing profession and to the community during his/her time as a student.

2026 Recipient:

CLAIRE SPILDE



HONORS CONVOCATION

NURSING SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

UD STUDENT NURSING ASSOCIATION SCHOLARSHIP

The UD Student Nursing Association (UDSNA) Scholarship goes to a student entering his/her senior year with a GPA greater than 3.0 who is a candidate for office in the UDSNA, shows caring and compassion in work, school, and community, has experience in CNA work, and goes above and beyond in his/her participation in the nursing program and his/her class.

2026 Recipients:

BROOKE BOETTNER



UD NURSING FACULTY SCHOLARSHIP

The UD Nursing Faculty Scholarship is awarded to first-year nursing students who have a minimum GPA of 3.0 and exemplify professionalism. The recipients are role models to fellow students in both clinical and classroom environments and demonstrate the care and compassion of a nurse you would want caring for you or your loved ones.

2026 Recipient:

PAIGE HORANEY



EMMA KEMPEL



HONORS CONVOCATION

NURSING SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

DR. KATHY DOLTER NURSING SCHOLARSHIP

The Dr. Kathy Dolter Nursing Scholarship is awarded to a first-year nursing student who has a minimum GPA of 3.0. The student must have demonstrated commitment to gaining experience in nursing care by work experience as a nursing assistant or LPN prior to admission to UD's nursing program. The student demonstrates care and compassion and exemplifies professionalism in both clinical and classroom environments.

2026 Recipient:

ISIAH AGUAYO



HOLLEY LYNN JAMES MEMORIAL NURSING SCHOLARSHIP

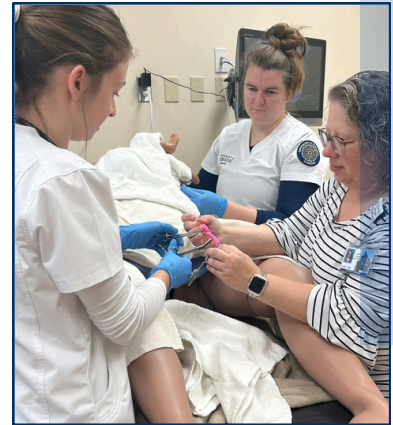
The Holley Lynn James Memorial Nursing Scholarship is awarded in memory of Holley James, daughter of Jesse James, University of Dubuque emeritus dean of admission. Second Lieutenant Holley James, a 2007 graduate of the St. Ambrose nursing program, died at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, while serving as an Army nurse. The recipient must be a junior or senior in the nursing program, and it is preferred they are a member of the UD Army ROTC program. The recipient is chosen by the senior military advisor of the UD Spartans Company and the head of the nursing program.

2026 Recipient:

ASHLEE BARDEN



IN THE CLASSROOM



Victoria High-Fidelity Birth Simulator

University of Dubuque nursing students gain hands-on obstetrical experiences using the Victoria High-Fidelity Birth Simulator. This realistic simulation allows students to practice labor, delivery, and emergency scenarios while building clinical judgment, teamwork, and confidence. Guided debriefing with faculty helps integrate classroom learning and clinical practice.

With birth, naming baby is a big responsibility. Victoria had a little girl, her name is **Spartina**. Special thanks to Taylor Bechen for the name suggestion at Homecoming!



Sarah J. Hatcher MSN, RN, CCE
Assistant Professor of Nursing



Students practice care of tracheostomy, suctioning and changing PICC line dressings



Seniors engaging in ICU Simulation



Juniors practice self-care: meditation & tai chi with Gary Wittman



Juniors in the lab

IN THE FIELD

CREATING A CULTURE OF CARING

University of Dubuque nursing students partner with the local Stonehill Communities organization, where they spent four Wednesdays onsite in the fall providing essential services. These experiences let students apply their skills in real-world settings while supporting the well-being of community residents.



My experience at Stonehill was amazing! The environment was a positive and supportive place for me to learn about caring for long-term care residents.

Emma Kempel

During my clinical at Stonehill, I had the opportunity to apply the nursing skills we learned in class while caring for residents. The staff provided guidance and feedback which helped me learn and grow. It was a truly rewarding experience and strengthened my confidence as a nursing student!

Norah Kettmann

UNIVERSITY of
DUBUQUE

Follow us on Social Media

www.dbq.edu/Academics/UndergraduatePrograms/Nursing/



IN THE FIELD

COMMUNITY-CENTERED INCLUSION



Volunteering at the Multicultural Family Center in Dubuque was a truly meaningful and rewarding experience. It reinforced the value of building a trusted relationship through small, authentic interactions, especially when working with middle schoolers who need a sense of connection before fully engaging with activities. One of the most meaningful moments was building trust with the middle schoolers through simple conversations about healthcare, coloring, Nintendo Switch games, and ping pong matches. This center creates a warm, inclusive community and does an incredible job supporting families from many different backgrounds. I am truly grateful to have been a small part of its successful mission.

Megan A. Cooley



UD junior nursing students spent the day at Dubuque's Multicultural Family Center last September. Two of our junior student nurses share their experiences while at the center.

Working with the diverse group of kids at the MFC was both exciting and purposeful. At our visit, we led an activity that taught the kids how to monitor their heart rate and how it fluctuates between rest and activity. Children learned basic cardiovascular concepts through hands-on learning and practice questions. Their curiosity sparked when we let them use our stethoscopes to listen to their heartbeat. This experience taught me to adapt my teaching to accommodate the needs based on age, cultural background, and attention levels. Interacting with the kids and playing games such as ping pong and the Nintendo Switch brought much laughter and created a positive, fun environment. Overall, this experience boosted my joy of working with children and created long-lasting memories.

Madison M. Young

COLLABORATION

The UD nursing students had a great interdisciplinary experience with the UD physician assistant students learning about spirituality and how we can be holistically taking care of our patients.



CONFERENCE UPDATES

Mini SUN Conference at the University of Dubuque on April 9, 2026

The University of Dubuque hosted this year's Mini SUN Conference on April 9, bringing together simulation educators/professionals from across the region. Sponsored by Laerdal, the Simulation User Network (SUN) is a national initiative advancing simulation-based learning, and our Mini SUN offers a regional version.

Simulation users from schools, hospitals, and EMS programs are invited, including those in nursing, PT/OT, athletic training, and paramedic/EMT education. In its third year— UD follows MercyOne and Finley in hosting this day of simulation, learning, and networking.

National SNA Conference - Houston April 8–11, 2026

Faculty members accompanied several nursing students to attend the National Student Nursing Association (NSNA) Annual Convention, held April 8–11, 2026, in Houston, Texas. This four-day national event brings together nursing students for specialty sessions, education workshops, networking with leaders, and a large trade show. Our nursing students enjoyed learning and exploring career-focused support.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

MAY 2018 GRADUATE: UNIVERSITY OF DUBUQUE NURSING PROGRAM



ANJA RISING



What inspired you to become a nurse?

As a very caring person, I knew early on that I wanted a career to help others. Nursing felt like a perfect path. It allowed me to care for people while also learning and practicing at a high level. When I was younger, my Grandma Florine was growing older, and the nurses who cared for her left a lasting impression on me. Their compassion and dedication were incredibly inspiring and played a big role in my decision to become a nurse.

Where has your degree taken you in your career?

Since graduating, I have worked at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. My nursing degree has opened the door to multiple roles/opportunities. Also, I met my husband at my very first nursing job. We now have two beautiful girls, who are truly the joys of our lives. Professionally, nursing has allowed me to pursue my current schooling for a huge personal goal of becoming a certified registered nurse anesthetist. I am so happy my career led me down this path.

What do you like best about being a nurse?

The ability to care for people during some of their most vulnerable moments. I value knowing that I can leave a lasting impression not only on my patients, but also on their loved ones.

What advice would you give to current nursing students?

Work hard, be kind, and chase your dreams. You can do hard things. I would also remind students to prioritize themselves. Nursing school is very important, and taking care of yourself matters. You can give so much more when you are pouring from a full cup.

What did you love most about being a Spartan?

Being a Spartan prepared me in so many ways. I had incredible opportunities, including being on the women's soccer team, serving on the nursing organization board and on the Iowa Nurses Association board. The nursing professors and adults around me supported and pushed me towards my dreams/goals. During my four years, I worked part-time campus jobs and stay actively involved around the campus. Truly, I loved my time at the University of Dubuque. Being a Spartan left a lasting impact on both my personal and professional life.

