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# WISCONSIN ACHIEVERS

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## Herzing Student Balances Adult Learning and Parenting Four

As the youngest of four children and a devoted mother, Nicole Howard's path to higher education has been

marked by challenges, sacrifices, and unwavering determination.

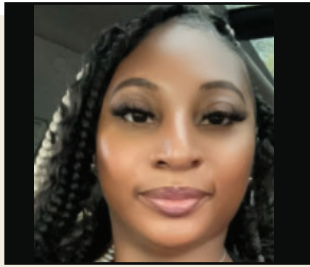
Nicole's childhood dream of becoming a pediatrician ignited an interest in caregiving at a young age. However, as she grew older, she discovered a nurturing side within herself that drew her toward nursing—a field where she could make a difference in the lives of others. Despite

facing numerous obstacles, Nicole remained steadfast in her determination to pursue her passion in healthcare.

After initially embarking on her educational journey, Nicole encountered health challenges that temporarily disrupted her path. For more than sixteen years, Nicole has worked as a medical assistant, demonstrating her dedication to the healthcare field and her desire to make a positive impact on the lives of others.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Nicole faced new challenges as she balanced work, family, and education responsibilities. With schools closed and virtual learning in full swing, Nicole transitioned to working as a phlebotomist, embracing new opportunities amidst the chaos of the pandemic.

Nicole's journey led her to Herzing University, where she found the flexibility and support to balance her responsibilities. The online options offered by Herzing allowed Nicole to pursue her educational goals while juggling the demands of work and family life—a crucial factor for adult learners like herself. It was here that she received funds through the Wisconsin Grant Program, an



Nicole Howard

*"The Wisconsin Grant was more than just financial aid. It was a lifeline that made my educational dreams a reality."*

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## Viterbo Student Lexi Oestreich is Dedicated to Helping Others

When a Viterbo University first-year student and single mother needed childcare for her one-year-old daughter, faculty member Matthew Bersagel Braley challenged his honor students to form a "care team," to provide babysitting services on campus four days a week while mom attended classes. That was all fellow student Lexi Oestreich needed to hear.

"Although Lexi didn't know this student, she responded immediately and has been one of the most consistent caregivers, taking time out of her already full days to spend time with a one-year-old, not for any recognition but because there was a need," said Bersagel Braley, of just one example of Lexi going out of her way to help others.

Bersagel Braley shared that story and many other kind words as he introduced Lexi as a recipient of the



Lexi Oestreich

*"I wouldn't have been able to afford college without the Wisconsin Grant program."*

St. Catherine's Medal at the annual Viterbo Student Recognition Ceremony in April 2024. The award is presented annually to students who "represent the high ideals of a Catholic college education" and is one of the university's most prestigious awards.

A first-generation college student and one of twenty-six graduates

of the Greenwood High School class of 2020, Lexi's education was made possible through the Wisconsin Grant Program and other financial aid. "I wouldn't have been able to afford college without it," she said.

Taking advantage of opportunities—academic, leadership, service, employment, and otherwise—turned out to be the operative phrase for Lexi at Viterbo Uni-

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122 W. Washington Avenue  
Suite 700  
Madison, WI 53703-2723  
608.256.7761  
editor@waicu.org

Eric W. Fulcomer, PhD  
President & CEO

Rebecca Larson  
Executive Vice President for External  
Relations

Pamela Seelman  
Director of Marketing  
and Communications

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## The Wisconsin Grant Program

The twenty-two private, nonprofit colleges and universities of Wisconsin operate without direct taxpayer support, but provide an invaluable public service to the state, educating more than 51,000 students a year. Many of Wisconsin's best and brightest need financial help to attend the college of their choice.

The Wisconsin Grant was enacted in 1965 to help qualified Wisconsin citizens to succeed. Each month, Wisconsin Achievers brings you success stories of Wisconsinites at WAICU-member campuses for whom the Wisconsin Grant Program has made a significant difference.

## Nicole Howard

opportunity she credits with easing her path and opening new doors.

"The Wisconsin Grant was more than just financial aid. It was a lifeline that made my educational dreams a reality," Nicole says. "It provided the support I needed to pursue my passion for nursing while balancing the responsibilities of work and family."

Looking toward the future, Nicole plans to obtain her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) by December of 2025, specializing in pediatrics—a field that has always held a special place in her heart. Her long-term aspiration is to become a nurse practitioner, allowing her to provide holistic care to patients while drawing upon her background in nursing.

As Nicole reflects on her journey, she offers valuable advice to fellow adult learners who may be facing similar challenges. "Reach out to the schools you're considering and have conversations with advisors," Nicole advises. "Explore all available options for financial aid and don't be discouraged by the obstacles you encounter. Remember, age and circumstances should never deter you from pursuing your educational dreams."

Through her resilience, determination, and unwavering commitment to her goals, Nicole Howard, of Milwaukee, embodies the type of healthcare student the Wisconsin Grant was meant to help—someone with a passion for service and the drive to help those in her community.

## Lexi Oestreich

versity. She conducted major research projects as part of a class and the university's Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship program, served as the president of the campus psychology club, participated in the Polar Plunge for Special Olympics, worked for the La Crosse Parks and Recreation Department, studied abroad in South Africa, and served as a peer mentor.

Lexi earned a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology with minors in criminal and community justice and substance abuse counseling from Viterbo University in May 2024. She was hired as a full-time outreach advocate at New Horizons Shelter and Outreach Center in La Crosse, the organization at which she completed an internship last fall and has worked part-time in the same position since February. The job involves meeting with clients in the shelter, helping them to set important initial goals involving challenging topics such as safety and fleeing, restraining orders, divorce, social services and other resources, and gaining employment.

While working for New Horizons, Lexi plans to earn a master's degree online to become a licensed mental health counselor. She would like to work with survivors of domestic violence or other abuse. Whatever her future position, Lexi wants it to be "on the ground helping people."

## FACT OF THE MONTH

58,089 students from around Wisconsin attending institutions in all higher education sectors receive the Wisconsin Grant.

Source: Higher Education Aids Board (HEAB),  
STUDENT AID EXPENDITURES FOR 2022-2023