

Self-Sufficiency
Program

Locally Grown Scholarship Breakfast

November 2, 2023, 7:30 a.m.
The Bluffs, Student Union
UW-La Crosse



ALUMNI & FRIENDS
FOUNDATION



Western Technical
College
FOUNDATION



“Empowerment Through Advocacy”

Melissa Touche 2023 Breakfast Speaker

Melissa Touche completed SSP in December 2018. Her SSP application read, “I am not the typical college applicant. I am 43 years old. I am a single mother of three young ladies. I am low-income. It’s been seven years since I attended a small community college in North Dakota.” That small college is Nueta Hidatsa Sanish College (formerly Fort Berthold College), New Town ND. In 2011, Melissa graduated with an associate of science in Environmental Science, earning Highest Honors.

Her SSP application shared an important life lesson and a secret of her academic success, “My mother has taught me to persevere, never give up, and, most importantly, she told me to not listen to anyone but God and my heart.” On December 2020, Melissa had “achieved a dream she dared not to let myself dream,” earning a B.S. in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from UWL. As the pandemic raged on, she gave the commencement address for our online WGSS graduation ceremony.

Now, as a disability advocate and peer specialist at Independent Living Resources, Melissa applies her considerable skills and deep commitment to ensure people with disabilities have information, choices, and respect. In her free time, she enjoys creating beaded jewelry and sells her pieces through her new online business, Boujee Arikara Creative Arts. Melissa says, “All of this is done with the love and support of my three best friends who are my daughters. They are biggest cheerleaders anyone can have.” On her graduation from UWL, her daughters gave her a fitting gift, the Wonder Woman outfit.

Breakfast Program

Greeting: Joe Gow, UWL Chancellor

Welcome: UWL Provost & Vice-Chancellor

Gratitude: Andrea Hansen, SSP Director

Inspiration: Melissa Touche, 2023 Speaker

Celebration: Fall 2023 Scholarship Awards

Closing: “All That Matters” Zoe de Boer, Soloist

Celebrating 35 years of SSP, 1988-2023

For 35 years, the Self Sufficiency Program at UW-La Crosse has encouraged and prepared single parents and other adults to pursue their college dreams. Chartered in 2004 and funded by your generous gifts, Locally Grown Scholarships support SSP participants in their first semesters in college. We are grateful!



SSP is a community engagement program of the Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Receiving Awards Spring 2020 to Spring 2023

Lisa Ehlers, SSP F17, Psychology, UWL (Graduated)

Erin Lee, SSP F15, Human Services, WTC

Lacie Lerum, SSP F17, Medical Assistant, WTC (Graduated)

Becca Lichtie, SSP F19, Nursing, WTC (Graduated)

Chelsey Mhyre-Foster, SSP S20, Sociology, UW-Parkview (Continuing)

Sara Pederson, SSP F18, Liberal Studies Associate, WTC (Graduated & Continuing)

Carmen Ritter, SSP F19, Human Services Associate, WTC (Graduated)

Melissa Touche, SSP F18, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, UWL (Graduated)

Xia Yang, SSP F16, Early Childhood/Middle Childhood Education, UWL (Graduated)

Cassidy Yates, SSP S22, Associate of Science, WTC (Graduated & Continuing)

Respect & Congratulations!



Terry Lille

**Associate Professor & Department Chair
Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies, UWL**

The Self Sufficiency Program is an integral part of the Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department. It is emblematic of what we stand and work for: community engagement and empowerment, promoting the value of higher education, and working to make that education more accessible to everyone in the community. RGSS is proud to be the home of this program which has had such an incredible impact on so many lives.

Fall 2023 Locally Grown Scholarship Awards

Ben Groth, Western Technical College

Human Services Associate Degree

My life has changed significantly in the past year. I overcame one of the hardest things I've ever faced, addiction. I have been clean since July 12, 2022. I am still going strong. This is the source of my strong desire to work in the recovery field.



Cassidy Yates, Bethel University

Neuroscience, Bachelor of Science

The thing I'm most proud of is graduating. I worked my butt off to get my associates in just one year, and I brought up my GPA from near a 1.4 to a 3.17. I maintained President's List every semester at Western, graduating with honors! Walking across that stage with my (bedazzled of course!) cap, gown, and chords, I cried. I am so proud of the woman I've become. As a child, I dreamed of "having it all together" by now. I think my childhood self would be proud of me too.



Celebrating 35 Years, 1988 – 2023

We are so grateful to the visionary friends who, 20 years ago, donated to the Scholarship Fund and kept on giving. We celebrate our more recent donors whose gifts have enabled us to offer larger scholarships each semester.

A heartfelt THANK YOU to all our donors who helped turn dreams into degrees for the past 35 years!

The contributions from our grant and gift-making partners are invaluable:

AAUW – La Crosse Chapter
Blahnik-Naugler Help Fund
Coulee Bank
Cleary-Kumm Foundation
The Elmwood Foundation

FSPA
Hope United Church
Lillian Kaplan Fund
PEO Sisterhood Chapter BI
Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse, Inc.

SSP Advisory Board

Jan Eriksen
Susan Fabian
D.A. Ferguson

Susanne Koehler
Sandi Krajewski
Betty Kruck

Sue Lee
Barbara Pollack
Joan Schoenfeld

Program Directors and Staff

Andrea Hansen
2011-present

Jan Wellik, Writing
Jen Kosiak, Math

Amy Sullivan
2002-2011

Bets Reedy
1988-2003



Karl Kunkel, Dean, College of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CASSH), UWL

The Self-Sufficiency Program provides people facing significant obstacles with a tremendous opportunity to prepare for and begin pursuing higher education. I'm extremely proud to have this program affiliated with the College of Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities. I see the clear value in this program because it changes lives, and I am very happy to support these efforts.

Stories from the Pandemic: Parenting, Learning and Earning

At 29 years old with a 9-year-old daughter with special needs, I finally figured out what I wanted to be. I want to be a nurse, just like my mom. I can honestly say, I did not think I would struggle this much being a full-time student. Finances are my biggest struggle right now. I have a job that has fewer flexible hours, so I had to change to working 12-hour shifts, but only for 48 hours/pay period. I barely make ends meet but it is necessary to succeed. Another struggle, because of COVID, is that over half of my classes are virtual. The best way I learn is face-to-face, so this is more challenging.

The pandemic could affect my experience as a student if my son's school goes back to virtual learning. Because he needs 1:1 instruction from me, I would not be able to do my own schoolwork until after he was finished in the evening. I would feel quite stretched between helping him with his education and focusing on my own.

I am most proud of maintaining my recovery and staying sober. It is a daily challenge that never goes away. As long as I stay focused, getting my homework done on time, keeping my bills paid, making sure I have food in the house, and my emotional support animal is healthy and happy, I am doing o.k. I am thankful for everyone in my life, and the blessings to continue living life sober.

As a student and parent, there have been challenges with technology, internet access, childcare availability, and general coordination of household management. I am concerned that as the semester progresses it will be challenging to manage the increasingly challenging course work. It has been challenging to find care for my daughter when I am at work. It is difficult to find evening care when I would like to work on my homework. This has led to many late nights, waiting until my daughter is in bed to be able to truly focus on homework. We have also had some financial difficulties as I have stepped away from several sources of supplemental income to decrease the risk of COVID-19 exposure.

Covid has been such a strain on financial stability. It has also been stressful, disconcerting, and overly politicalized, increasing anxiety and depression. I have been very blessed in receiving financial help through mutual aid efforts, a fancy way of saying, there have been community programs and within UWL. This has been lifesaving, and home-saving.

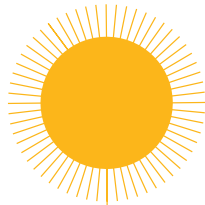
Because of the current pandemic, just like everyone else, paying for my tuition and school materials is becoming difficult. But like everything else in life, this will also pass. As an immigrant it has been a little different and difficult for me. When I attended my first SSP class, living in a shelter with nothing but my books and ambitions, what I've accomplished seems unimaginable and impossible.

SSP Changes Lives, 2-Generations at a Time

Since 1988, the Self Sufficiency Program has provided continuous support, education and tools for single parents and other adults to pursue their dreams of going to college. SSP counts on the support of many local organizations and individuals to fund scholarships and program support.

Offered each fall and spring, SSP offers a 12-week session to prepare these adults for success in college, allowing them to explore academic and career interests in a supportive setting. SSP has helped hundreds of adults achieve their goals.

SSP is a community engagement program of the Race, Gender, Sexuality Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.



Self-Sufficiency Program

**UW-La Crosse, RGSS 4300 Centennial Hall,
1725 State Street | La Crosse, WI 54601**

www.uwlax.edu/ssp

Contact: ahansen@uwlax.edu