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### **Degrees within reach UWL’s Win-Win Program helps 126 former students cross the college finish line**

Written by UW-La Crosse University Marketing & Communications

Over the past four years, UW-La Crosse’s Win-Win program has helped 126 former students turn unfinished college business into a proud accomplishment. The annual outreach initiative reconnects with students who were close to completing their degrees but left before finishing — giving them a clear, supported path to graduation.

The results speak for themselves: Since 2020, 44 students have earned their bachelor’s degree, while 82 have been awarded an Associate of Arts (AA) degree through the program.

**Back to the classroom, a decade later**

Ryan Sneath left UWL in 2015 and spent the next decade working a wide range of jobs — bartender, cook, barista, and even owning his own goat grazing business. Then, in summer 2024, he received an email that changed everything. UWL staff informed him that his previously earned credits added up to an Associate of Arts degree.

“I felt a sense of relief knowing my effort would be recognized,” Sneath says. “It was proof of my work, time, and money spent at UWL.”

The news inspired Sneath to audit a sculpture class in fall 2024, and by spring 2025, he was enrolled full-time, working toward a bachelor’s degree in General Studies. Coming back was an easy decision, he says.

“Being around people who could open my eyes to new ideas — that’s what drew me back,” he says. “I was excited to be able to bounce ideas off people in a community.”

One of his geography classes even takes place in the same room he sat in a decade ago. It’s a reminder of how much he’s grown.

“The second time around, I have a learned perspective,” he says. “I’ve realized that professors do the teaching, but I have to do the learning. You get out what you put in.”

Sneath is on track to graduate in fall 2025. “I’ve learned how to apply myself — to stay curious, stay flexible, and keep learning,” he says. “More things feel possible now.”

**Personalized support, meaningful impact**

Susan Schauer, a Wisconsin resident, mother and now a substitute teacher, says the Win-Win program saved her more than $3,000 and countless hours of coursework. After moving back to Wisconsin from North Dakota, she learned she needed at least an associate degree to work in area schools.

“I knew I was close, credit-wise,” Schauer recalls, “but I was overwhelmed by the classes I needed to take at the community college.”

That changed when she contacted UWL.

“Within 10 minutes of speaking with UWL Academic Services Director Britta Osborne, she had my transcripts pulled up and let me know exactly what I needed to finish,” she says. “All of my questions and emails were answered within the day, and I felt that it truly mattered that I was able to get it all finished."

Instead of continuing at the community college, Schauer completed her Associate of Arts degree at UWL in December 2024 — faster and more affordably. She now works as a substitute teacher in the St. Croix Central School District.

“I love subbing because it allows me to meet all of the kids in the district, and I get to work with most of the teachers, too. My days are rarely boring,” she says.

**Behind the scenes of student success**

The Win-Win program requires coordination across many campus offices — including the Provost Office; Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning; Academic Advising Center and Career Services; Records & Registration and the college offices.

“This is a great example of a multi-unit UWL collaborative project that has a potentially life-changing impact on individuals,” says Sandy Grunwald, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. “It exemplifies what makes UWL so great — people working together to positively impact our students, former or current.”

Most students contacted by the Win-Win program express excitement, relief, and hope for the future, says UWL Academic Advisor Mic Nauman. The program shows that the university understands that life doesn’t always follow a straight path, she adds.

“Students stop out for a variety of reasons,” Nauman says. “The Win-Win program recognizes this and reminds them that earning a degree is still a possibility and we can work together to make that happen.”