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**High aspirations: Recent grads leverage Prehealth courses to pursue medical careers**

**Brooks, Charest begin medical school, following in footsteps of recent alumni who benefited from focused lab, research experiences**

Written by ​Jerry Poling, University of Wisconsin–Stout

In 2010 when the $43 million, gleaming Jarvis Hall Science Wing addition was dedicated at UW-Stout, Gov. Jim Doyle and others called it the finest science facility in the state.

By at least one measure, the building with state-of-the-art lab equipment and classrooms is living up to its lofty billing: It has turned out dozens of graduates with a focus in [Prehealth Sciences](https://www.uwstout.edu/academics/undergraduate-majors-minors/pre-health-sciences-pathways) who have gone on to successful careers in professional health fields, including as doctors, pharmacists, dentists, chiropractors and more in Wisconsin and beyond.

Two recent graduates are beginning medical school this fall, Anna Brooks at the UW-Madison and Olivier Charest at the University of Sherbrooke in Quebec, Canada. “I am extremely grateful for all the doors that Stout has opened for me,” Brooks said. “It’s an amazing place to go to college.”

Prehealth Sciences is a focus area that offers targeted preparation for admission to professional schools. It can be added to UW-Stout’s preparatory bachelor’s programs, including biology, chemistry, physics, applied science, biochemistry and molecular biology, and health, wellness and fitness. The programs provide students with lab-based classroom and research experiences, part of the [polytechnic advantage](https://www.uwstout.edu/about-us/our-polytechnic-advantage).

Brooks and Charest were aiming for medical school all along, knowing Prehealth Sciences would put them on the right track. They appreciated the mentorship of professors like Jim Burritt, Jen Grant and Dr. Alex Hall. Focused and inspired, they conducted research projects, mentored other students and were involved on campus and in the community, earning scholarships and awards and graduating with honors.

“The strength of UW-Stout for Prehealth students is that not only do we have a lot of hands-on opportunities, but class sizes are small. Students really get to know their professors, who also really get to know them,” Hall said. “This allows for a lot of collaboration, research opportunities and mentorship.”

**‘This is exactly what I want to do’**

Brooks recalled one class where students worked on removing a gene from a strain of yeast and another in which they led their own project studying the impact of various medications on cancer cells that had been created in the lab by the professor.

“I’ve heard from other students at big institutions who didn’t have the hands-on research opportunities I had at Stout, like the [Cadaver Lab](https://www.uwstout.edu/academics/colleges-schools/labs-studios/cadaver-lab),” said Brooks, who loved the small class sizes and ability to work closely with her professors.

[Brooks, who was born in Ukraine](https://www.uwstout.edu/about-us/news-center/inspiring-graduate-anna-brooks-bs-applied-science), graduated in May 2023 from UW-Stout in applied science then was chosen for a 10-week internship at UW Medical School Urology Lab. In 2022, she interned at the University of Washington Medical School.

While applying to medical schools in 2023, she worked as a phlebotomist at Mayo Clinic Red Cedar in Menomonie. “I witnessed the whole synergy of the team and what a physician does. It was a pleasure to see that kind of collaboration,” she said. “It reassured me that this is exactly what I want to do.”

She remembers the day in January when she received a call from a dean at UW-Madison telling her she’d been accepted into the medical school, something she first considered as a 10-year-old while coming across a medical publication. She celebrated with her Mayo Red Cedar co-workers, exclaiming, “I’m going to be a doctor!”

**‘The support is there and the equipment top notch’**

Charest, who graduated in applied science this past May, also was a Blue Devil athlete. He played hockey but saw his career derailed in his second season by a knee injury. He had other knee injuries going back to his high school days; one subsequent interaction with a physician who helped him avoid surgery with a knee strengthening program sparked an interest in medicine as a career.

“If I could have the same impact that doctor had on me, the empathy she had toward my situation, if I could add this to any patient I see on a daily basis that’s what I’m really looking forward to as a doctor. Most patients come in in a vulnerable position. I was able to be in the shoes of my future patients,” he said.

Charest had a competitive internship in summer 2023, one of 18 chosen from 300 applicants, at the University of Rochester Medical School in Rochester, N.Y., focusing on pediatrics. “I saw the research side and the clinical side. Being able to see what I’ll do in the field was great,” he said.

While at UW-Stout, Charest became a certified nursing assistant and volunteered as a CNA in palliative care at Dove West Healthcare in Eau Claire and in the emergency department at Red Cedar Mayo. “Many people believed in me and paved the way for me to succeed, so being able to have these opportunities meant the world to me,” he said.

His education at UW-Stout gave him the independence to explore opportunities in the labs and through research. “The program teaches you a lot of qualities you need in the field and helps you grow a little faster. The support is there, and the equipment is top notch.”

**From Prehealth Sciences to professionals**

Charest and Brooks are excited to take the next step in their careers this fall. They will have four years of medical school, followed by a three- to seven-year residency, depending on the field of medicine they choose.

The University of Sherbrooke, in Sherbrooke, Quebec, is about an hour’s drive from the Montreal suburbs where Charest grew up. Brooks has moved to Madison with her husband, also a UW-Stout graduate.

Another spring 2024 graduate, Chaeyun Jung, began pharmacy school this fall at the University of Minnesota.

December 2023 graduate Henry Scheit is attending St. Catherine University in St. Paul for the Doctor of Physical Therapy program.

They add to an already long list of graduates in the past 15-plus years choosing a variety of health and medical fields. They include:

* **Kym *Ludwig* Klimek**, 2013 graduate, finished pharmacy school at UW-Madison and is a pharmacist in Green Bay.
* **Nolan Green**, 2015 graduate, is a doctor of osteopathy with Mayo Clinic. He graduated from the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine.
* **Dylan Meyer,**2015 graduate, did post-doctorate research at Harvard Medical School and is a research scientist at Vertex Pharma in Boston.
* **Matt Flesher**, 2017 graduate, graduated from the St. Scholastica physical therapy program and works at Tamarack Health in Hayward.
* **Trever Koester**, 2018 graduate, finished Harvard Medical School and is a surgical resident at University of Michigan Medicine.
* **Neal Wrobel**, 2019 graduate, earned a Ph.D. in biomedical science at Rush University in Chicago and is a biomedical research scientist at Rush University Medical Center.
* **Issabella Stueck**, 2020 graduate, attended Palmer College of Chiropractic and is a chiropractor in Appleton.

Other recent alumni are working as dentists, physician assistants, nurses, surgical first assistants, athletic trainers, clinical lab technicians and clinical trial coordinators.