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Striking a balance: How UW-Green Bay’s RN to BSN program supports nursing students beyond academics

Written by Michael Shaw

The dynamic nature of healthcare mandates a commitment to regular learning and professional development. In an era where online education can feel impersonal, Morgan Stary’s experience with UW-Green Bay’s [RN to BSN program](https://www.uwgb.edu/rn-bsn/) underscores the impact of community, commitment, and the invaluable role of advisors.

Without question, Morgan Stary leads a hectic life. While she manages a full-time nursing job at Bellin Hospital in Green Bay and pursues a bachelor of science in nursing degree at UW-Green Bay, her calendar remains full. “My days off are my homework assignment days.” To add to her busy routine, “Monday is my bowling day, Tuesday is my volleyball day, Wednesday is another bowling day.”

Interestingly, bowling and nursing seem to be a unique combination for her.

Born in Green Bay, Stary launched her nursing career at Robert Morris University in Chicago on a bowling scholarship. The university, not only renowned for its robust nursing program, also won the women’s Bowling Intercollegiate Team Championship in 2014. The urban environment, however, didn’t resonate with her preferences. She returned to Green Bay, obtaining her Associate Degree in Nursing from NWTC. One thing that never wavered was her passion: “I always knew I wanted to be a nurse.” Bellin Hospital welcomed her as an RN, but she was determined to elevate her career through UW-Green Bay’s RN to BSN program.

At Bellin, she is part of a crucial segment. “It’s called our clinical decision unit, and it’s for patients where we’re not sure if they’re going to be inpatients or if they just need a few tests and then go home. It’s a very fast paced, high patient turnover floor.”

Nicole Micolichek, Advising Manager for UW-Green Bay’s nursing program, played a pivotal role in Stary’s academic pursuit.  “I know Morgan was really set on having a specific time that she was done by, so we talked through what that schedule would look like” Micolichek says. “We talked through what types of courses she wanted, how she wanted to blend some general education in with her nursing courses. We planned, but I mean, it was based on what she wanted and what was going to work best for her schedule.”

This tailored methodology sets the program apart. Micolichek explains, “We hear from a lot of students who think they want a program that’s super flexible and they can do everything on their own time. Then they realize that actually sets them up to not be successful because they need a little more structure in their classes. They don’t want a fully self-paced class where no one’s actually helping them.”

Despite her inclination for traditional classroom settings over online ones, regular interactions with Micolichek kept Stary grounded. “All my professors have been very personable and all of them are willing to help,” says Stary. “Nicole is the only one I’ve really met in person. I’ve met with her every single semester at the beginning.”

Consistent engagement by advisors and faculty members is essential. As Micolichek puts it, “We end up with very few students who can’t complete the work because our faculty are constantly reaching out and making sure that students aren’t just being forgotten along the way.”

Balancing a career and school is not for the faint of scheduling. Stary’s typical day kicks off at 7:00 AM. “I’m very, very lucky that I only work eight-hour days on the floor.”  She also clocks 12-hour shifts on Saturdays and Sundays every third weekend. Combine this with being a full-time student, a bustling social life, and her allegiance to bowling, her schedule is undeniably tight.

For Stary, achieving her BSN is more than a mere academic accomplishment. “I would love to be a nurse educator but will stop for a bit after I graduate with my bachelor’s to have a break from school.” (But not bowling, with four 300 games and counting to her credit.) “But I could see myself going again. That’s probably how my goals have developed – it’s just my way of thinking.”