



Scholarship Recipients

Academic Year 2024-2025

The Grace Abbott School of Social Work

May 2024

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Omaha

Congratulations!

Choosing our scholarship recipients is always a challenging task, given the outstanding pool of candidates we review each year. Our recipients stand out not only for their diverse backgrounds but also for their unwavering commitment to furthering their education and making a positive impact in their communities. These scholarships recognize and support the incredible potential and dedication of our students. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our generous donors, whose contributions make these scholarships possible, empowering recipients to achieve their academic and professional dreams.



Cristina Estrada-Roman



Cristina Estrada-Roman is a BSW student. She was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska. She aspires to be a medical social worker and serve her community in the future.



Isis Hernandez-Troche



Isis Hernandez-Troche is an MSW student who is originally from Celaya, Guanajuato, Mexico and immigrated to the United States at a young age. It is Isis' goal to use her education to serve underserved and diverse populations through her current role as a Service Coordinator at Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging and her future work. She expects to graduate from UNO in the fall semester of 2026 with two degrees in Social Work and Public Administration.



Miya Leonard



Miya is a current MSW student who is originally from Omaha, Nebraska. She is looking forward to finishing the MSW program and becoming a practicing social worker in Omaha. Her dream is to become a medical social worker and eventually a professor who teaches future social workers.



Jessica Johnson



Jessica Johnson, CSW, is a Certified Social Worker in the Care Coordination Program at the UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute. A 2023 Creighton University graduate, Jessica is currently enrolled at the University of Nebraska at Omaha to attain a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree, set to graduate in December 2024. With three years of professional experience working with poverty, homelessness, domestic violence and developmental disabilities, Jessica specializes in services and support designed to transform the lives of individuals from vulnerable communities. She dedicates her time and energy to combat social injustices and inequalities, ensuring every individual is a priority.



Megan Heidenreich



Megan Heidenreich is a Master of Social Work student originally from Brentford, South Dakota. Throughout her academic and professional career, Megan has worked for Child Protective Services, completed a practicum at Children's Nebraska in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, and taught interpersonal violence prevention and intervention for the past two academic years within the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center. Megan is a Nebraska State certified Victim and Survivor Advocate and has a strong passion for supporting and empowering survivors of interpersonal violence in her future social work roles.



LaKeisha Bonam



LaKeisha Bonam is a MSW student born and raised in the Omaha area. She has dedicated over two decades to shaping young minds in OPS with unwavering dedication, she tirelessly educates and motivates countless students, guiding them towards realizing their full potential. LaKeisha possesses a rare ability to discern the innate goodness within each child, nurturing their self-belief with unparalleled skill and patience. Her legacy is marked by the countless lives she has positively impacted, instilling in them a sense of confidence and purpose.



Liv Ozenbaugh



Liv is starting their first year of graduate school after graduating with their undergraduate degree in social work with minors in LGBTQ+ and sexualities, as well as sociology. Liv is planning to focus their work with advocacy for LGBTQ+ youth.



Amy Smith



Amy Smith is a MSW/MPH student currently working at the Omaha VA. Originally from Council Bluffs, Iowa, Amy is a proud Army wife and mother of two daughters who has lived "all over." Amy is very excited to graduate next year and start her next chapter serving the communities she grew up in.



Brittany Jones



Brittany Jones is a MSW student who aspires to create a safe and supportive space for individuals to explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. She is dedicated to fostering meaningful connections, promoting self-awareness, and empowering individuals to navigate life's obstacles with resilience and strength. Her goal is to become a compassionate and effective therapist who serves as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of others.



Audra Hango



Audra Hango is a BSSW student and disabled combat veteran on a mission to make a profound impact, she's more than just a survivor - she's a thriver. From the tranquil artistry of quilting to the serenity of yoga and sound bath, she finds solace in healing practices. Enduring the trials of intimate partner violence and conquering stage 3 breast cancer, she's emerged with a fierce determination to create change. With each stitch, stretch, and soothing resonance, she's weaving a narrative of resilience, empowerment, and hope.



Jaida Sorensen



Jaida Sorensen is a BSSW student in the Grace Abbott School of Social Work who is originally from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Jaida has been on the dean's list every year throughout her college experience and plans on attending the master's program in Fall 2025. Jaida developed an early interest in helping the less fortunate in her community through school and church-based programs. She looks forward to putting forth everything she learned as well as using her unique perspectives to make a change in the community.



Dylan Lemke



Dylan is originally from Hastings and is currently pursuing a MSW at UNO. Her career aspirations are to work with the LGBTQIA+ population as a clinical social worker. She plans to receive clinical training at Live Oak in Chicago this upcoming year.



Allison Contreras



Allison Contreras is a MSW graduate student who is originally from Omaha, Nebraska. Allison has a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and has decided to pursue a Graduate Degree in Social Work. Allison is planning to graduate from the program in December 2024 and pursue her career in Social Work.



Yohanna Flores



Yohanna is a MSW student who is originally from Grand Island, Nebraska. She is committed to continuous learning and providing a safe space for those around her.



Kenzie Lathrum



Kenzie Lathrum is a MSW student from Omaha. Kenzie previously completed her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at UNO with a concentration in Developmental Psych. She is passionate about working with families in the Child Welfare System through Clinical Social Work and enjoys mentoring children in foster care.



Cecilia Tuttle



Cecilia Tuttle is a MSW student from Omaha, Nebraska. Cecilia graduated from Creighton University in 2024 with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. At Creighton, she was a member of the Freshman Leadership Program, the International Psychology Honors Fraternity, Kappa Kappa Gamma, and Chamber Choir. In addition to her involvement at Creighton, Cecilia has also been active in her role as a Program Support Staff at Completely KIDS since June 2022, where she discovered her passion for social work. She hopes to pursue a career that promotes child and family welfare.



Jill Spale



Jill is an online MSW student from Columbus, Nebraska. Jill aims to pursue her master's degree to continue empowering and supporting students, families, and staff at her local school district. Outside of working full-time and studying, Jill loves to spend time with her husband and their four children, traveling, being outdoors, baking and cooking new recipes, thrift shopping, and decorating.



Katie Marchio



Katie Marchio is a MSW student from Omaha, NE. She volunteers for a variety of local nonprofits. Katie has volunteered within the local foster care system in various capacities since 2015. She currently is a member of the IB17 Nebraska Foster Care Review Office board. After graduation, she plans to obtain her LIMHP license to continue to serve the community she was raised in.



Charlotte Turner



Charlotte Turner is a BSSW student from Omaha, NE. Charlotte intends on applying for UNO's MSW program following her BSSW graduation. She has career aspirations of working for a nonprofit organization or in a public school setting.



Syerra Watson



Syerra Watson is a MSW student from Shelby, NE. Syerra currently works as a Child and Family Services Specialist at the Department of Health and Human Services where she enjoys working with families in need. In the future, Syerra intends to obtain her LIMHP and LADC to provide therapeutic services to victims of trauma and those experiencing substance use problems in her community.



Austin Alfrey



Austin Alfrey is a MSW student who is originally from Elkhorn, NE. Austin completed his undergraduate at Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri where he earned his B.S. in Criminal Justice and was a 4-year letterman in baseball. Austin currently resides in Omaha, NE with his wife Maria and his 16-month-old daughter Jovie. Austin intends to pursue school social work after completing the MSW program.



Alea Reifenrath



Alea Reifenrath is a MSW student. She is originally from Hartington, NE. She plans to pursue clinical outpatient therapy.



Gaynelle Calloway



Gaynelle Calloway is an MSW student who was born and raised in Omaha, NE. She is the first in her immediate family to obtain a college degree. She is looking forward to using what she has learned to be a part of community healing.



Alexis Thrasher



Alexis Thrasher is a MSW student at UNO, a Nebraska Specialized Juvenile Probation Officer, a community volunteer, and a dog mom. She has goals of continuing her work with adolescents and families in the community, a passion for group and family therapy after graduation, and a dream of directing a group home for teenagers in the future. Alexis lives in Lincoln with her husband, Dusting, and dogs, Bird and Bandit, who have been fully supportive while navigating graduate school and continuing to fulfill a love for travel.



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