

May 11, 2021

# The power of "Yes"

## Madison Hale '21 embraced opportunities while at UWS

Life began to change for Madison Hale when she discovered the power of "yes" and began to embrace new experiences and challenges. She's now earned a college degree in only three years, and will start graduate school this fall enriched by meaningful academic and volunteer experiences.

"I just started saying, 'Yes, I'm going to do anything that's getting thrown my way,'" she said.

The philosophy revealed opportunities that fit perfectly with her major: [social work](#). She chose it because she loves giving back.

"I wanted to help people," Hale said. "I really like the idea of just being able to spend my whole life volunteering. My grandfather raised me that way. He said, 'You should always help people when you can.'"

From the moment she took her first courses in the [UWS social work program](#), Hale knew she'd made the right decision. "It felt really good and I loved it, so I stuck with it."

She has appreciated the vast expertise of the entire department, especially mentor Cherie Dakota, assistant professor of social work. "She's been one of the biggest, strongest supports for me," Hale said.

Outside the classroom, Hale immersed herself in campus activities. She was drawn to one volunteer opportunity in particular: The [Veteran and Nontraditional Student Center](#). Its mission is to provide engagement and academic support to veterans and non-traditional students.



"It's been amazing because I got to help develop programs, run programs and organize events," Hale said. "I met some amazing non-traditional students and veterans. One of my favorite parts of the job is seeing them succeed, because that's the coolest thing in my book. They come in and they're struggling, and the next thing you know, they're graduating!"

She's been heavily involved with the VNSC for three years. She's helped out with too many events and activities to count, but one of her proudest achievements was helping to organize the annual Seussville Family Fun Night. The major event usually draws up to 800, targeting student parents and community members.

Hale's support of the VNSC branched out to its parent office, the [Department of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#). As if that wasn't enough, she also spent two years serving on the [Student Government Association](#).

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Of course, she also found time to devote to her studies. She's graduating early, thanks to some credits she'd earned in high school and over the summer. Her final GPA is 3.8, exceeding her own expectations.

"I thought if I went to college and I got a degree I might do OK, but I didn't think I'd do that," said Hale, who is the first in her family to graduate from college. "I definitely want to say it's in large part due to the faculty and staff at UWS, because they're amazing supports."

She never envisioned herself doing a research project, but her mentors in the [McNair Scholars program](#) provided her with invaluable encouragement. Her McNair research project, "Health Care Disparities and Needs in Native American Veteran Population," was complicated by COVID-19. Many veterans' organizations were closed because of the pandemic, but Hale pressed on. She connected with veterans from all tribes within Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Hale's project revealed some major themes for improvement in the health care of indigenous veterans. It also revealed a new passion for her: research. "I enjoyed it. That was my niche. I love policy writing and grant writing and research," she said.

She'll put those newfound research skills to work in the generalist Master of Social Work program at St. Cloud State University this fall. And as she closes out her career at UWS, she has much to be proud of — including winning the [Chancellor's Leadership Award](#). It's all a credit to her courageous spirit and authentic generosity.

"I've been involved in a lot of things and I've definitely overcome a lot of things I never thought I would," Hale said. "I've just been very thankful for every opportunity I've had and the people I've gotten to work with."

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