

UWAA Scholarship Recipient

Danielle Johnson Uses UWAA Scholarship to Find Right Fit

by Lisa Bisbee
Alumnews Writer

In high school, Danielle Johnson did not enjoy biology or chemistry classes. They were classes she went to begrudgingly. So when people suggested that she should become a nurse, she shrugged them off. She enjoyed theater and choir so it was no surprise when, as a freshman at the University of Wyoming, Johnson started her college career as a music education major.

"I had no idea what I wanted to do, but I couldn't picture myself doing anything else at that point," Johnson said.

Just a few classes into the program, Johnson knew it wasn't for her. So she switched to international studies – only to find it definitely wasn't a fit. After talking to her advisor and concentrating on some of her own personal qualities, Johnson chose nursing as her major.

"I took anatomy and things just clicked," Johnson said. "I knew it was what I wanted to do then."

Now a senior at UW, Johnson is finishing up a residency rotation in Casper and will soon move to Denver for two months to complete a residency at Denver Children's Hospital. Johnson,



Danielle Johnson

a 2009 Riverton High School graduate, has not once regretted her decision to become a nurse.

"Once you start nursing school, you just jump right in," Johnson said. "There is so much hands-on training."

As Johnson looks to graduate with a bachelor's degree in May, she's both excited about her future and thankful for the educational experience she's had during the past four years. Awarded a UWAA scholarship all four years of her college career, Johnson said the gift of a scholarship has been amazing.

"It has been the biggest blessing," Johnson said. "My parents have four kids in college and one at home still.

With the Hathaway scholarship as well, Johnson said she is amazed that she will be able to start a career without college loans.

"It has been a huge blessing to have that help and come out of college without debt," Johnson said. "I am so grateful for the people that set these scholarships up and for what they do for students."

Growing up in Wyoming, Johnson always planned to attend UW. Keeping a high grade point average while active in student council, drama, music, sports and choir during high school, Johnson knew she could continue a well-rounded education in the state she already lived in.

"I looked around just for fun and applied to some different universities, but really knew I was going to Wyoming," Johnson said.

Johnson has a lot of UW family history. Her father, Steve Johnson, graduated from UW in 1987. Her mother, Julie Ferwerda, attended UW in the late 80s. Though she didn't earn a degree then, Ferwerda just recently earned a degree in sociology from UW. Johnson's sister, Emily (Waxler) Rudkin graduated in 2012 with a degree in elementary education and another sister, Jessica Johnson, is a freshman at UW.

"It has been pretty comfortable for me to attend UW," Johnson said. The high caliber nursing program has provided Johnson with firsthand experience she says she values. Johnson said her professors have not only pushed her, but inspired her. She has seen one of her professors, Deb Retz, struggle with breast cancer while continuing to work and teach.

"She's just an inspiring person," Johnson said. "I have had some amazing teachers."

Her pediatrics professor, Elizabeth Goodwin, urged Johnson to apply for a residency at the Denver Children's Hospital – an opportunity Johnson said she is thrilled about.

"She really has pushed me along the way," Johnson said.

As Johnson finished up her rotation at a hospital in Casper, the 22-year-old said she is eagerly looking forward to her residency in Denver. For two months, Johnson will work in the cardiac intensive care unit at Denver Children's Hospital.

"I think it will be an amazing experience," Johnson said. "I'm nervous and excited. I feel like I am going to learn so much."

Once she completes her residency, Johnson said she is not sure what she wants to do. She someday may want to pursue a nurse practitioner license. Or possibly attend medical school. But she knows she first wants to spend some time treating and caring for patients in the medical setting.

"Right now I don't have any specific plans," Johnson said. "I want to get some real life experience and then decide what my next step will be." 

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