

FREEDOM SCHOLARSHIP OPENS DOORS FOR NORTHERN ALUMNA

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ABERDEEN, S.D. – For Itzel Brick, becoming a first-grade teacher at Simmons Elementary in Aberdeen, South Dakota, was more than a dream; it was a journey marked by hard work, resilience and opportunities. Many of those opportunities came from the Freedom Scholarship at Northern State University.

Brick, a 2024 graduate with a bachelor's degree in elementary education, looks back on her time at Northern with gratitude. "Getting scholarships meant I could spend more time on campus and focus on my classes without constantly worrying about tuition," she said. "It motivated me to stay on top of my grades because I needed to maintain good academic standing."

One of her most memorable experiences, made possible by the Freedom Scholarship, was studying abroad in Salamanca, Spain. "It was incredible," she said. "Experiencing a new culture and education system gave me fresh perspectives I now share with my students."

The scholarship also opened doors to professional growth. Brick took part in education panels and attended a national conference in Florida for aspiring teachers. "Those opportunities helped shape me into the teacher I am today. They reminded me why I chose this path and showed me I belong in education."

However, her college journey wasn't without challenges. In the spring of her sophomore year, Brick became a mother. "Balancing school and motherhood wasn't easy," she said. "The Freedom Scholarship gave me room to breathe. It meant I could keep moving forward without choosing between my education and my family."

While at Northern, Brick stayed active in TRIO and the South Dakota Education Association. She also worked in the registrar's office for more than three years, gaining experience that would prove invaluable. "Those years were full of lessons, friendships and support. I wouldn't trade them for anything."

Now teaching first grade at Simmons Elementary, Brick still relies on the professors who guided her at Northern. "They're still my go-to for advice," she said. "On tough days, they're there to remind me why I do what I do."

Reflecting on her journey, Brick said, "The Freedom Scholarship wasn't just financial help. It opened doors I didn't think I'd walk through. Studying abroad, attending conferences—those experiences shaped who I am today."

She added, "Scholarships like this change lives. They changed mine."

About the Freedom Scholarship

The Freedom Scholarship is South Dakota's first public-private partnership for student scholarships. It provides need-based financial support to students attending participating institutions, including Northern State University. The scholarship aims to reduce student debt and keep graduates living and working in South Dakota.

To learn more about [scholarships](#) and other financial assistance opportunities, contact [NSU Financial Aid](#) at 605-626-2640 or finaid@northern.edu.

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