

# Wisconsin Achievers

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## About Wisconsin Grants

*The twenty-four private, or independent, nonprofit colleges and universities of Wisconsin operate without direct taxpayer support, but provide an invaluable public service to the state, educating more than 57,000 students a year. Many of Wisconsin's best and brightest need financial help to attend the college of their choice.*

*The Wisconsin Tuition Grant, now known as Wisconsin Grants, was enacted in 1965 to help qualified Wisconsin citizens to succeed. Each month Wisconsin Achievers brings you success stories of Wisconsinites at WAICU member campuses for whom Wisconsin Grants have made a significant difference.*

**Wisconsin Achievers** is published monthly by the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU), 122 W. Washington Avenue, Madison, WI 53703-2723; 608.256.7761; mail@waicu.org.

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## A focus on theater enhances critical communication skills

Donnie Williams of Milwaukee understands the importance of communication. As a junior with a double major in theater and communication arts at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, he values nuance, tone and even non-verbal signals. "My favorite class at Stritch has been Interpersonal Communication," said Williams. "It was rewarding to be in a classroom environment with other students who wanted to learn, and instructed by a professor who was so well-equipped with the tools to teach us."

Much of Williams' learning also takes place in a less traditional classroom – the Nancy Kendall Theater. Rooted in the liberal arts tradition, Stritch's theater program combines experiential training with rigorous academic coursework to ground practice in theory. Each year, theater students perform four productions – a musical, a children's show and two plays. A seasoned veteran of the Stritch stage, Williams has appeared in six shows to date during his undergraduate career.



Donnie Williams

Williams, also a singer, easily transitions from vocally demanding musical performances to dramatic monologues to downright silly characters. What do these different performances have in common? They're all entertaining! Williams' most recent performance as the hen in "Jack and the Beanstalk" had audiences of all ages laughing, thanks to his comedic flair.

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## Changing views about autism through life experience and research

Rachel Stanley, a Ripon College senior from Waukesha, Wisconsin, is an autistic woman, and she wants to help change the way that society and her discipline of psychology treat autistic people. In addition to psychology, Stanley also has a self-designed major in disability justice. She is focusing both of her senior research projects on the experiences or treatment of autistic people.

"There are a lot of problems with how psychology regards autism in general," Stanley says. "Autism is generally very medicalized and portrayed as a disease even more so than other disorders. Autistic people are depersonalized in literature; no one asks autistic people about their experiences," she says.

Stanley is the first person in her family to attend a four-year college. Her mother attended one semester of a community college but did not continue, and her father did not graduate from high school. She chose Ripon College for her education because of the opportunities it offers. "Ripon has a very robust psychology program that provides lots of research experience," she says. "I knew I wanted to go into psychology before I even applied to Ripon, so this was very exciting to me. The size of the school was also appealing, as I do not



Rachel Stanley

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“Donnie contributes a unique stage presence and sense of humor to Stritch’s performing arts program,” said Mark Boergers, chair of the theater department. “Because he has worked so hard to attain the bravery to be uniquely himself on stage, his personality and voice become a part of the fabric of our productions and add a colorful vibrancy to the human stories we portray.”

Williams also leads the university’s a cappella group and has been active in University Ministry, choir, and other student organizations. With coursework and extracurricular activities, Williams’ days can be a bit hectic, especially when he’s rehearsing for a play. But he wouldn’t have it any other way. “If you would have asked me in high school if I’d be good with managing such a crazy schedule, I would have laughed,” said Williams. “I was the most unorganized person ever! But at Stritch, I’ve learned to work hard for the opportunities I’ve received.”

In addition to talent, determination and discipline, Williams has another critical key to his success: financial support. Like many students, Williams faces financial barriers to funding and completing his college degree. He is grateful for the tuition assistance provided by the Wisconsin Grant. “Financial aid was actually the deciding factor in my college search,” said Williams. “Fortunately, the Wisconsin Grant helps students like me. Without that financial support, I wouldn’t have the money to pay for the education I’m receiving at Stritch.”

After he graduates from Stritch, Williams plans to pursue professional theater opportunities and possibly enroll in a master’s degree program. “Earning my college degree means I’ll have a chance to achieve more in life,” said Williams.

**Rachel Stanley** continued from page 1

do well in large crowds. Further, the financial aid that Ripon offered made the price of attending comparable to that of a state school.”

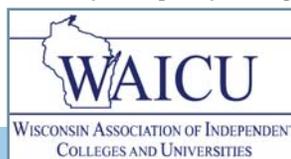
Financial aid from Ripon and the Wisconsin Grant have been vital to her pursuit of higher education. “Because of my disability, I cannot work full time, and most of what I earn goes towards paying for medical bills,” she says. “As an independent student, financial aid has made it possible for me to continue my education.”

She says her college degree will mean opportunities to further her career and ambitions, and it will give her the tools to make change in the world.

“I want to conduct autism research and help develop more sensitive and person-focused treatments, which I could never do without a college degree,” Stanley says. “I didn’t expect I would come to love research so much, but the research experience provided to me by Ripon’s psychology program really opened my eyes. Now research is a large part of what I want to do with my life.”

Stanley plans to pursue a doctorate in clinical psychology. Her career goals are to conduct autism research that focuses on the personal and lived experience of autism, and then to use that research to develop treatments that are appropriate and targeted for the needs of autistic individuals.

“I also want to be more broadly involved in disability advocacy and policy change,” she says.



*Wisconsin's Private, Nonprofit Colleges and Universities*

Alverno College *Milwaukee*  
 Bellin College *Green Bay*  
 Beloit College *Beloit*  
 Cardinal Stritch University *Milwaukee*  
 Carroll University *Waukesha*  
 Carthage College *Kenosha*  
 Columbia College of Nursing *Milwaukee*  
 Concordia University Wisconsin *Mequon*

Edgewood College *Madison*  
 Lakeland University *Sheboygan*  
 Lawrence University *Appleton*  
 Marian University *Fond du Lac*  
 Marquette University *Milwaukee*  
 Medical College of Wisconsin *Milwaukee*  
 Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design *Milwaukee*  
 Milwaukee School of Engineering *Milwaukee*

Mount Mary University *Milwaukee*  
 Neshotah House *Nashotah*  
 Northland College *Ashland*  
 Ripon College *Ripon*  
 St. Norbert College *De Pere*  
 Silver Lake College *Manitowoc*  
 Viterbo University *La Crosse*  
 Wisconsin Lutheran College *Milwaukee*

## FACT OF THE MONTH

Of WAICU students who graduate in 4 years, the percentage of those who are minority students has risen steadily since 2012.

Source – IPEDS Graduation Rate Surveys