

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 56,000 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.

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Ripon student prepares for career as vocational rehabilitation counselor

Ripon College sophomore Alexis Riggs of Ripon, Wisconsin had challenges as she prepared to achieve her dream of higher education. She is a first-generation college student from a family with limited means, and she was born missing the lower part of both arms.

But with a lot of determination and a lot of help, her dreams are coming true. The Wisconsin Grant is part of her financial aid package.

Alexis is majoring in anthropology and minoring in sociology at Ripon College. She plans to go on to graduate school to study vocational rehabilitation counseling and become a rehabilitation counselor.

She wants to help people with disabilities get the resources they need to get jobs. She says that being a person with a disability and having her own counselor gives her a unique perspective that will enhance her ability to advocate for others with disabilities.

She already is getting practical experience. Since May 2018, she has been a job coach for Diverse Options in Ripon. She accompanies people with disabilities to their community workplaces and helps them develop the skills they need to succeed.

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Alexis Riggs

MSOE student rockets to new heights

"I was always curious about how and why things work the way they do," said mechanical engineering sophomore Efreem Dana.

Efreem first got a taste of engineering during high school when he participated in the Madison West Rocket Club. The club required students to design, build, and test the flight performance of model rockets and compete against teams both regionally and nationally. He and his team took home the gold in the Rockets for School competition as well as competed along with 100 teams across the nation in Team America Rocketry Challenge (TARC).

"The Madison West Rocket Club helped me see what areas of engineering interested me," said Efreem. "I found my passion to be designing and building the things I wonder about. I was interested in the mechanical side of what I was doing, which is why I decided to pursue a path in mechanical engineering."

Strong academics, intimate class sizes, and a downtown location were key drivers in Efreem's decision to attend the Milwaukee School of Engineering. He continues to dive into his passion in mechanical engineering and rockets at MSOE by participating in the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) and MSOE Rocket Club.

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Efreem Dana

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On campus, she works for the Office of Financial Aid and tutors in anthropology and sociology at the Franzen Center for Academic Success.

She also participates in Love Your Melon, an organization that supports the fight against pediatric cancer; is a member of Alpha Delta Pi sorority; and is on the executive board of Panhellenic Council.

“I really enjoy getting involved on campus,” Alexis says. “The groups I am involved with have philanthropies and ways of helping people. I make blankets for Children’s Hospital and have gone to Milwaukee and Madison to volunteer at Ronald McDonald House, so I’ve been able to really get involved through these organizations.”

Having a strong financial aid package relieves the worry she might have had otherwise. “A lot of students can’t afford college as it is really expensive,” she said. “Money is a really big issue for students like myself. . . [Students] may have to work instead of doing homework. I think it’s really helpful that organizations and people are willing to give to students.”

Sources like the Wisconsin Grant, provided by the Governor and Legislature, are important. “It’s really helpful because I don’t come from a wealthy family,” Alexis says. “It’s nice to have financial support from people who don’t really know me. I’m getting these kinds of scholarships and grants so I can get my education and continue on to grad school.”

She says her family is really proud of her, “especially being first generation and having a disability. They don’t always know how to help me because they haven’t experienced this kind of thing. So it’s been really awesome to them and to me.”

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He is an academic excellence chair for National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), a member of the Carter Academy Leadership Board, and plays on the MSOE Club Soccer team.

Efrem participated as a shadow with the MSOE Rocket Club during the Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium (WSGC) 2019 challenge. A shadow is a student who helps the team but does not participate directly in the competition for the first year. In addition to his position on the Carter Academy Leadership Board, Efrem also worked in the Carter Academy as a program/professor assistant. The Carter Academy is a unique bridge program for students who desire to enroll at MSOE but need further academic preparation. As a program assistant, Efrem serves as a mentor and tutor to prepare new students for MSOE.

Receiving the Wisconsin Grant helped propel Efrem one step closer to achieving his goals after graduation.

“Attending college without financial aid and scholarships is very hard nowadays. The Wisconsin Grant is like a bridge for my financial barriers and made my education and career goals easier to obtain,” said Efrem.

Efrem aspires to be a design engineer for spacecraft after graduation.

“I desire to use my engineering knowledge and skills to support other engineers who are trying to transform the world to the next level by solving problems starting from the community to searching for new planets.”

FACT OF THE MONTH

WAICU institutions produce 27 percent of the engineering bachelor’s degrees in Wisconsin.

Source:
IPEDS 2017



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
Concordia University Wisconsin - Mequon
Edgewood College - Madison

Herzing University - Milwaukee
Holy Family College - Manitowoc
Lakeland University - Plymouth
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
Nashotah House - Nashotah
Northland College - Ashland
Ripon College - Ripon
St. Norbert College - De Pere
Viterbo University - La Crosse
Wisconsin Lutheran College - Milwaukee