

Wisconsin Achievers

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About Wisconsin Grants

The twenty-three 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 52,000 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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Concordia University Wisconsin student overcomes challenges and is on the way to becoming a speech-language pathologist

Lizzy Balsiger has had it rough in a lot of ways.

She has a rare group of genetic tissue disorders called Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome. The disease can cause an array of problems including joint hypermobility, long-term pain, chronic fatigue, dizziness, palpitations, and digestive disorders.

The tremendous financial demand of Lizzy's medical bills has forced Lizzy and her mother below the poverty line time and again. At one point, the pair even found themselves victims to homelessness.

In high school, Lizzy had a flare-up of her EDS that left her wheelchair bound, and doctors predicted she would only get worse from there.

Miraculously, however, Lizzy took a turn for the better her senior year. Throughout it all, her incredibly generous spirit and humble heart never quit. In the midst of her health struggles, Lizzy volunteered in her high school's special education department and fell in love with the individuals whom she served there. Soon after, she set her sights on becoming a speech-language pathologist — a career that requires at least a master's degree, and often a doctorate degree, to be successful in the field.

continued on page 2



Lizzy Balsiger

Bellin College nursing student prepares for career in transplant unit

A career in nursing provides a chance to help, heal, and bring hope; a chance to learn and to find a purpose, fulfill a passion and gain a life of rewards. Valerie Ehr, a senior from Menomonee Falls, is dedicated to doing just that and is pursuing her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree at Bellin College in Green Bay.

Valerie originally planned on attending a large college until she toured Bellin with her older sister, who is also in the medical field. Both were impressed with the nursing program and the sense of community. Valerie shared, "Everyone was friendly and smiling, and you just got the sense that students here were not just a number in a program, but rather seen as a valued individual. This was a change from the larger schools that I looked at. Now I can say that the respect and care I've received at Bellin have made my college experience such a positive one."



Valerie Ehr

Valerie has excelled in her studies and been named to the dean's list for her academic excellence. She is also on the Student Senate and serves as a Student Ambassador. Another priority for Valerie is her involvement with the Wisconsin Student Nurses Association (WSNA), an organization that mentors the professional development of future registered nurses, providing educational resources, career guidance, and leadership opportunities. Valerie attended the WSNA convention and was elected to serve as the

continued on page 2

Lizzy Balsiger continued from page 1

Lizzy knew that if she was going to attend college, she would need to find the closest school possible — a school that was near her trusted medical team and her mother/support system. That school happened to be Concordia University Wisconsin.

“Instantly I thought of the money,” Lizzy says. “All I’m thinking is private school? Plus my medical bills?! I was just seeing dollar signs.”

Lizzy’s concerns were abated, however, when she learned of the financial support package she would receive. The Wisconsin Grant — combined with scholarships from Concordia, her community, and even specific families (whose special needs children she served) who rallied together to support her financially — has helped make a college education possible for this first-generation post-secondary learner.

Once enrolled at CUW, Lizzy quickly found that Concordia wasn’t simply the “last resort” for her; it turned out to be the best-case scenario. “I fell in love with Concordia pretty immediately,” Lizzy said. “It’s a small enough school that you receive personalized attention from professors, but it’s not so small that you miss out on opportunities.”

Despite her physical health limitations, Lizzy does all that she can to take full advantage of CUW’s opportunities. Professors say that she consistently participates in class and is a leader among her peers. In addition to maintaining a high level of engagement in her academic work, she is a student worker in the library, a New Student Engagement team leader, and a peer leader.

She is also the vice president of Concordia’s Best Buddies Club (an extracurricular group that supports the special needs students who live and study on campus through Bethesda College, a partner of Concordia University Wisconsin). She’s involved in intramural sports, pre-med club, prison ministry, dance team, and is a member of the National Student Speech Language Hearing Association (NSSLHA). Before COVID-19, Lizzy also held down a consistent job as a caregiver for a man with special needs and worked as a respite caregiver for others in the area.

Valerie Ehr continued from page 1

nominations director in 2019. The nominations director is responsible for securing candidates for all WSNA Board positions, organizing the registration process for the convention, and preparing ballots for all WSNA elections.

In addition to her extracurricular activities on campus, Valerie works as a Certified Nursing Assistant on the cardiac unit at Froedert Hospital in Milwaukee and is a library assistant at Bellin. The pandemic, however, has resulted in her hours at work being reduced. The Wisconsin Grant and the financial aid she receives from Bellin College help her to continue her studies.

“Receiving the Wisconsin Grant has allowed me peace of mind,” says Valerie. “It has allowed me to not have to worry about getting a third job to get myself through this school year.”

On track to graduate in 2021, Valerie has her sights set on working in a transplant unit after being inspired in high school when a friend received a life-saving transplant surgery.

FACT OF THE MONTH

Ninety-one percent of undergraduates receive grant/scholarship aid (including institutional aid) at WAICU members compared to 46 percent at public four-year institutions in Wisconsin.

Source: IPEDS 2017-18

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
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