

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 53,000 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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Marquette University student working to end therapy stigma

Mental health is important to Alma-Aliyah Tolson.

Alma-Aliyah, a sophomore studying psychology in the Klingler College of Arts and Sciences at Marquette University, says her own experiences with mental illness and how it has affected her family are what drive her to pursue a career as a mental health counselor.

“Counseling and therapy are things my family is very open about. In society, though, there is a social stigma behind therapy and getting help, and that’s something I want to help change,” the Racine, Wisconsin, native says.

Alma-Aliyah, who is part of the Marquette student chapter of the NAACP and Marquette’s Black Student Council, is the recipient of the Wisconsin Grant as well as the Talent Incentive Program Grant.



Alma-Aliyah Tolson

“Being able to receive these grants allows me to focus on my studies rather than my finances, and I am so grateful,” Alma-Aliyah says. “Another large contributor to my university experience is the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at Marquette. It has been such a

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Lakeland University senior studying to earn teaching degree

Emily Bird is motivated to serve others. So, it’s no surprise that nearly every aspect of her Lakeland University (LU) experience is preparing her for a career as a teacher.

Emily, a senior at Lakeland from Union Grove, Wisconsin, participated in the local 4-H organization as a child and was raised by a family that helped others. She’s majoring in middle childhood education. She recently completed a field experience with first graders at Northview Elementary School in nearby Howards Grove.

“I absolutely loved interacting with the kids, seeing how a classroom functions, and forming relationships with the kids and staff in class,” Emily says. “I realized this is what I want to do for the rest of my life.” Many of Emily’s previous teachers have deeply impacted her life, and that also inspired her career choice.

“I want to do for other students what they did for me,” she says. “I have always felt good after I have served others. I want to help my students with experiences in the classroom. I want to be part of their support system, be a person they can talk to, and someone they can look up to. I want to be a resource for them.”

The Wisconsin Grant that is part of Emily’s financial aid package makes attending Lakeland possible. Her mother passed away when she was in high



Emily Bird

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Alma-Aliyah Tolson continued from page 1

consistent support system, outside of the financial aspect of it.”

EOP is a federally funded TRiO academic program at Marquette that enables low-income and first-generation students whose parents do not have a baccalaureate degree to enter and succeed in higher education. In 1969, Marquette founded the first EOP program in the nation, which has earned a reputation as one of the most distinguished and admired federal TRiO programs in the country.

Alma-Aliyah says she has been most influenced by her Social Welfare and Justice course at Marquette, which focused on understanding how the lack of resources in urban areas affects the communities and how to start meaningful discussions about areas for improvement.

Studying underserved communities runs parallel to Alma-Aliyah's goal of becoming a mental health advocate. She strives to raise awareness of the importance of understanding mental illness and to teach and empower others to prioritize mental health.

“There is a lack of representation when it comes to Black women in the field of psychology. And within the Black community, there is such a strong stigma that comes with both acknowledging your status mentally and seeking treatments,” Alma-Aliyah adds. “I believe that by increasing the number of Black counselors and therapists, the more people of color will begin to prioritize or even acknowledge their mental health.”

FACT OF THE MONTH

Seventy-seven percent of undergraduate financial aid packages at WAICU member institutions are made up of grants and scholarships that do not have to be paid back.

Source: IPEDS, Completions Survey, 2020-21

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school, and with her sister also attending college, Emily's aid and earnings from working are critical to help her pay for school.

Emily is getting a jumpstart on her profession by being a model of service for the Lakeland community. She is a tutor for writing and education majors, and she comes with impressive credentials. She's never missed a spot on Lakeland's Dean's List for Academic Achievement. As a three-year member of the LU volleyball team, she's been a three-time conference Scholar Athlete. Last spring, she was named Lakeland's Outstanding Student in English.

As a sophomore, Emily got involved with Pawsitism, a Sheboygan-based nonprofit that trains Autism Assistance Service Dogs for children. She took over training a therapy dog named Halo last fall when he was eight months old. Now she serves as co-president of Lakeland's Pawsitism student organization Puppy Club, which has between 15-20 members.

“It's been really life changing that I'm able to have Halo on campus, see him bring other people joy, and help train him to do what he will do the rest of his life,” Emily says. “Seeing the Pawsitism staff, their passion for the program, and what they want to do for others has been amazing. I have formed so many relationships with people who care about my experience. It's a community I love to be part of.”

Emily also participates in Elementastic, a Lakeland student-run business that has LU students delivering science experiments and lessons with local children. She's currently rewriting lesson plans and coming up with new experiments for the business, further helping her to prepare for her own classroom and adding to her impressive service record.



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