

# 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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## Alverno student overcomes obstacles

Brianna Walker wasn't supposed to live past her fifth birthday. Spoiler alert — she did.

The recent Alverno graduate and Wisconsin Grant recipient was born with a medical condition that caused her bones to grow at a faster rate than her heart, baffling doctors and surprising her parents with her recovery. "I treat every day like it's this gift handed to me. Nothing is ever guaranteed in life. It's just such a motivator to me," she says. "I'm here for a reason, and I'm going to figure out that reason."

Her ability to focus helps Walker navigate other obstacles life throws her way, including the fact that she was born with a cataract in her right eye, rendering her partially blind. While her disability doesn't prevent her from pursuing her goals, it can cause others to see her differently.

"The biggest obstacle is when people hear that I'm partially blind, they start to doubt me. It's disheartening," she says. "But I've learned to overcome what other people want and expect from me and to trust my abilities. I know I can do this."



Brianna Walker

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## Lakeland student blends math and creative interests

Lakeland University junior Nathalie Cairo is pursuing an interesting mix of coursework on her way to a bachelor's degree. Cairo is a double major in mathematics and graphic design, a mixture that allows her to incorporate her love for the precision of numbers and the creativity of design work.

The Kenosha, Wisconsin native is attending Lakeland thanks to a generous financial aid package that includes a Wisconsin Grant.

"By the end of my freshman year, I decided to add a graphic design major," Cairo said. "I had previously taken an Illustrator class, and I absolutely loved it. I knew that this was something I wanted to keep doing. I've always really enjoyed art, and with this second major, I will be able to use my creativity in my work."



Nathalie Cairo

Cairo was a runner in high school and when it came time to select a college, continuing her athletic career was important. She was drawn to Lakeland because of the friendly atmosphere, and she's excelling. She is a standout for the Lakeland cross country and track teams, earning all-state honors in the fall at the Wisconsin Private College cross country meet.

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**Brianna Walker** continued from page 1

For Walker, this perspective has guided her transformation from a shy high school student into a confident woman who gave the student address at Alverno's December 2019 commencement.

"It is such an honor. If you would have told freshman Brianna that she would be giving the speech, she would never, never have believed you," she says. "Speaking and representing my sister graduates was such an honor."

Sisterhood and community are the major themes of Walker's Alverno story. Growing up in the small Wisconsin town of Tomah, about 170 miles northwest of Milwaukee, she realized she didn't want to end up just a number at a large school. At Alverno, she quickly found her home away from home and lived on campus for the entirety of her college education. "It is amazing being part of this community," she says.

Ultimately, the sisterhood of Alverno is what helped Walker, a psychology major, thrive, and it's one of the many things she'll carry with her after she graduates.

"Alverno has made me a new person. It brought me out of my shell," she says. "I'm so grateful that Alverno specializes in empowering women to not only believe in ourselves but also in our sisters around us."

**Nathalie Cairo** continued from page 1

She serves as an academic captain for both teams and is a member of Math Club, as well as a math tutor for her peers.

This past spring, she interned for Lakeland's communications office, which gave her a mix of experiences. Cairo participated in weekly creative meetings, as well as contributed and implemented ideas for projects. She also assisted the campus videographer by working on video shoots and learning about Lakeland's media production.

When COVID-19 shifted meetings to virtual, Cairo – like everyone else – learned to adapt to working remotely. She continued to stock her portfolio by creating graphics for Lakeland's social media.

"When you go to college, you think you have an idea of everything that's going to be thrown at you," she said. "This past semester when we were hit with the pandemic, everything changed drastically. I had to learn to adapt to a new learning technique when everything moved online."

"Altogether, it was a great experience from which I learned so much. With two years left in school, I hope to continue learning from Lakeland's talented team, then eventually I want to intern for a bigger corporation."

After graduation, she plans to work as a graphic designer or maybe lead a company's social media to help promote their brand and product. "Being creative is very important to me and to find a job where I can use that skill would be a dream come true," Cairo said.

**FACT OF THE MONTH**

Students' chances of graduating in four years are 63 percent higher at WAICU members than at public four-year institutions in Wisconsin.

Source: IPEDS 2018



*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