

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 54,000 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 by the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU):
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Ripon student makes the most of every opportunity

Solangel (Sol) Gonzalez of Green Bay, Wisconsin, a junior at Ripon College, has big dreams of becoming an entrepreneur and operating her own Tex-Mex restaurant someday. She has always enjoyed school and learning; that desire to be an entrepreneur and the people around her encouraged her to aim for higher education. She was determined to be better equipped to succeed in life.

Sol knew she wanted to advance her life through the skills and knowledge that a college education would provide her, but finances were a serious issue. She is the first in her family to attend college, and her family is unable to support her financially.

"I come from a very low-income family," Sol said, adding that her FAFSA determination showed an expected zero percent contribution from her family. "Without grants and scholarships, including the Wisconsin Grant, I wouldn't be able to get a postsecondary education," she said.

continued on page 2



Sol Gonzalez

St. Norbert College student "turns lemons into lemonade"

When something bad happens (like a global pandemic) good things can come out of it. Such was the case for Wisconsin Grant recipient Connor Voelker. He turned his first year of college basketball into an award-winning season, without playing one game.

Connor, now a sophomore basketball player at St. Norbert, had his first season of hoops (2020-21) taken away due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Connor and the Green Knights continued to practice and work out, but he had more free time on his hands than expected.

So, what did Connor do? He went to work.

He is double-majoring in mass media communications and business marketing at St. Norbert. Connor wants to be a sports broadcaster one day, so he took advantage of the extra time by going home to Kiel, WI to do play-by-play for what turned out to be close to 50 girls' and boys' basketball games at his high school alma mater, the Kiel Raiders.

"Just turning lemons into lemonade," Connor said. "That's how I looked at it. It was disappointing not having a basketball season at St. Norbert, but you know what? It worked out alright."

Connor called the games on internet radio and YouTube video, coordinating everything. In addition to doing the play-by-play, Connor handled the graphics and advertising as well.

continued on page 2



Connor Voelker

Sol Gonzalez continued from page 1

At first, attending a school like Ripon seemed out of reach for her. “Ripon sent me their free application in the mail and I said, ‘Why not?’ It was a free application. I never saw myself going to a private liberal arts school, but after sending in my application and learning more about Ripon and their curriculum, it became an option.

“Ripon felt like the right choice. There is a small-town feel in Ripon where the professors know your name and not just your ID number. The one-on-one connection between staff, professors, and students was a big part of my decision.”

Sol is taking advantage of all that her college career offers. She is a double major in business management and communication and is active on campus. She is president of COMMunity (a communication organization), has served on both the Alumni Board and Student Senate for two years, and has a student job with the alumni office.

“It’s very important to be active,” she said. “It helps distract me from the stress of classes and homework. It also helps me build up a resumé and gain different job skills and knowledge from the various organizations that I’ve been involved with on campus.”

She also has found support in other ways. “The Student Support Services office tries to help all of their students as much as they can,” Sol said. “The office really helped me find my place here and not ever feel like I didn’t belong. Ripon also was very generous with my financial aid; without this, I would have never been able to afford an education here on my own.”

Her greatest encouragement comes from her own family. Sol says her parents have always pushed her to do her best in school, to take things one day at a time, and to enjoy every moment. “They are my biggest supporters in everything I do,” she said.

Connor Voelker continued from page 1

Connor’s efforts did not go unnoticed. A mentor and friend nominated him for the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association Student Awards for Excellence, and in early March, Connor took home top honors.

“There were a number of standards I had to meet. They reviewed a video clip judging the quality of the broadcast. I was lucky enough to win first place,” Connor added.

Connor had hip surgery, so he’s on the mend and doing therapy. He plans to be ready for the St. Norbert College Green Knights basketball season this fall. Despite the wild ride his first year of college turned out to be, he says coming to St. Norbert College was the right move.

“It’s been great at St. Norbert. I have had the privilege to talk with a number of basketball recruits, and I tell them I was unsure of coming to St. Norbert at first. But I tell them there is no question I made the right decision, and that you have to pick a place where school is priority,” Connor said.

“I didn’t have basketball my freshman year because of the pandemic, and yet I’m still really, really happy here. That says it all,” he added.



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

FACT OF THE MONTH

Students’ chances of graduating in four years are 50 percent higher at WAICU members than at public four-year institutions in Wisconsin.

Source: IPEDS 2019-20