

The Scholarship Yooper

He's from the U.P.!



By: Seth Polfus



THE MONEY WALK

Imagine this: on any day of your choosing, day or night, you could take a mile long walk for the potential to win \$250. You could take this walk at noon on a Saturday, or at midnight on a Tuesday. How many times would you set out for a chance to win?

Now imagine this: every time you take this walk, you lower the time it takes to navigate that same path. You get better at knowing where you can take shortcuts, and now you can walk two miles in the time it used to take to walk one.

These walking examples are similar to applying for small scholarships. Most applications take minimal time, from thirty minutes to an hour. The requirements aren't highly specific, and the scholarships usually have a small pool of applicants which improves your odds of winning. As you apply for more of these scholarships, you will start seeing the same prompts over and over again. After typing out your extracurricular activities and leadership experiences for the tenth time, you will become more efficient at adding your activities to various scholarship applications.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SMALL SCHOLARSHIPS

Recently I heard of a small scholarship offered by a fraternity on the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse campus. The requirements included community activities, GPA, leadership activities, and a short essay. This application took around an hour to complete and submit. The next week, I was contacted by the fraternity to interview for the scholarship. I asked them how many applicants they received, and they responded with “eight”...TOTAL. The fraternity offers two of these \$250 scholarships each year. That means that the eight people that applied each had a 25% chance of winning \$250. A week later, I was notified that I was a recipient of the “Better Man” scholarship. I had just made \$250 for an hour of my time. If an individual was working a minimum wage job in Wisconsin, I would have just made the equivalent of that person working 35 hours! Isn't that ridiculous? At the casino, you have the potential to make \$250 just as quickly. However, you also put the money you currently have at risk, a risk many college students literally can't afford to take.

**The thing about scholarships? There is no risk.
It is risk-free money waiting for you to grab it!**

It is a very easy mistake to overlook the small scholarships. In my first blog, I talked about winning my first scholarship which had a grand prize of \$100. My experience with scholarships has helped me realize how important small monetary scholarships are.

BUT... HOW ABOUT THE LARGE MONEY AMOUNTS?

As I search for scholarships to apply for, I am often pulled to the ones that promise 5-10 thousand to the winner. However, these scholarships are highly competitive and therefore have the lowest probability of winning.

One of the scholarship applications that took me the most time was the US Army Award of Excellence. This scholarship took many hours editing a short yet complicated 500-word essay on defining my Habits of Excellence. When I was named a finalist for this nationwide scholarship, I was on top of the world. The Pro Football Hall of Fame even brought Green Bay Packer Hall of Famer James Lofton to my school for an assembly. However, as I looked further into the award, I noticed the only prize for being named a finalist was a trip to Canton, Ohio to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. The only time you received prize money is if you were named number one out of the top twenty-five individuals in the nation. I did not win, and the \$2500 in prize money was awarded to a student from North Carolina who had a 4.8 GPA.



Instead of hiding your faults, use your essay to show how you've overcome and grown from them

This was an amazing experience in itself, but it just goes to show that even though I spent many hours applying for this award and was named a finalist, I still didn't win more money than someone who won a very small scholarship award.



My experience with this award goes to show that even the biggest scholarship programs in the nation do not always pay you in the way you want them to. Small scholarships are easy, fast, and often have the highest probability of winning. While the prize amounts are small, the monetary amounts quickly add up. \$250 can help pay for a meal plan or help pay off a couple books that would have otherwise come straight from your pocket.

Applying for small scholarships is similar to a walk. Walks are often short, easy, and potentially very satisfying. If there is a chance of \$250 at the end of the walk, how many times would you go back again? Small scholarships are the best way to get started on the path to letting scholarships pay for your college education, so start using them to your advantage!