

# The Scholarship Yooper

He's from the U.P.!



## MY STORY

My name is Seth Polfus and I am currently a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. I attended high school in a small town named Powers in Michigan's Upper Peninsula with a graduating class of twenty-seven. Yes, you heard that right; twenty-seven kids in my entire graduating class. I played basketball and baseball, ran cross-country, and was a member of our National Honor Society and Key Club organizations. I graduated valedictorian of my enormous class of 27 with a 4.0. I am passionate about volunteering, enjoy giving back to the community, and... love applying for scholarships. You may be saying to yourself, "That's only because you are the kid that wins every scholarship he applies for." You are wrong.

# THE NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

As I began my junior year of high school, my mom started throwing newspaper clippings about scholarships on my desk. I often looked at these, saw the essay requirement, and tossed it in the garbage can. However, little did I know how important those tiny newspaper clippings could be to paying for my college education.

As my senior year started, I began applying to colleges. Many of the application fees were in the 50-100 dollar price range. My parents told me they would not help me pay for this college fee; therefore, this money would be coming out of my pocket. In the matter of a week, my potential list of ten colleges was whittled down to a select few. This is where scholarships started becoming a high priority in my life.

## THE FIRST SCHOLARSHIP

One day as I came home from school, there was another newspaper clipping on my desk. It was a scholarship from a local organization. The prize was 100 dollars, and the requirements included submitting your SAT score, GPA, extracurricular activities, and a short description of yourself. This application looked easy enough, so I started writing down the extracurricular activities I participated in throughout high school. I was done an hour later, and I submitted it the next day.

A week later, I received a letter in the mail. I had won the scholarship! To send the check to me, the organization requested the address of the college I would be attending. That is when it hit me; I had just made more than one hundred dollars per hour for the time I put into applying for that scholarship.



# WHAT DID THIS TEACH ME?

This was mind-boggling; I had just made the equivalent of two days' pay at my summer job from one hour of working from my bed. Therefore, I started applying for scholarships every day. Many were local, but as I started to become a better scholarship writer, I began to branch out to regional and national scholarships. As I continued to write for additional scholarships, I noticed some questions were being asked repeatedly. For example: "What is one hardship you have faced and what have you learned from it?" and "What are your career goals?" As I began to respond to similar prompts repeatedly, I realized all I had to do was rephrase my words to match the specific scholarship prompt. With this tactic, I became a scholarship-writing machine. Over the course of my senior year, I applied for nearly 50 scholarships, and acquired over twelve-thousand dollars for my first year of college. However, one of the key lessons of this story is that even though I made over \$12,000 by working a few hours each week writing scholarships, I only won 7 out of the 50 scholarships I applied for.

**Tip #1**



Make an email specifically to use when applying for scholarships.

# SCHOLARSHIP WRITING AS A JOB

During the past two summers, I have worked a minimum-wage job at a local grocery store. Getting some extra pocket-money was nice, but I knew what I was making at the grocery store wouldn't even be enough to pay for a meal plan here at UWL. Some of those first fifty scholarships I applied for took nearly 7-8 hours of work to finalize. That work entails writing, editing, researching, and perfecting my scholarship application. However, as I moved on to my 50th scholarship, a copy and paste and little editing later, I was done within an hour. If I spent ten hours on each scholarship I applied for, I would still be making 17 dollars per hour, about 9 dollars more than I was paid at my summer job. I was being paid for a job where there were no restrictions, where I put in the amount of effort I saw fit, and where I worked at a pace I desired. I viewed applying for scholarships as my job, and it literally paid off.

The logo for the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Foundation. It features the text "UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN" in a small, black, serif font at the top. Below it, "LA CROSSE" is written in a large, bold, maroon serif font. A thin horizontal line separates "LA CROSSE" from "FOUNDATION", which is also in a large, bold, maroon serif font.

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN  
**LA CROSSE**  
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Reading blogs and researching about scholarships is the first step. The next and most important step is finding scholarships and actually applying for them. The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Foundation is giving out over one million dollars in the 2019-20 school year to over 800 students. This is a golden opportunity that only about 24% of students here at UWL take advantage of.



In my future blogs, my goals are to share some of my personal tips about how to strengthen your scholarship application, explain some tricks I have learned from applying to various scholarships, and describe some of the difficulties and failures I have experienced when applying for scholarships. I intend to inform you about how crucial scholarships are to paying for your higher-level education and how to utilize them to your advantage. College classes can be a significant stressor in your life; add the question of how you will pay for college on top and you may be in for a bad headache. Scholarships can help you take some of that stress away and using my experience, I will get you on the track to winning some scholarships and free money.

## Tip #2



Don't paraphrase the writing prompt at the beginning of your essay.

