



Getting Through Together

Reflecting on the impact of the COVID-19 Student Emergency Fund

At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, the Mount Union COVID-19 Student Emergency Fund was established to provide relief to the many students facing financial challenges resulting from the pandemic.

Thanks to the support of generous alumni and friends, more than \$300,000 was raised to support students during these unprecedented times. Throughout the year, students applied for aid, and more than 115 students were helped by the Student Emergency Fund. This fund helped students to pay bills, afford groceries, access technology needed for distance learning, and continue their education at Mount Union. Without this support, their lives would look different today.

Nearly 18 months after the pandemic began, a few Purple Raiders who received funding from the COVID-19 Student Emergency Fund discussed what this meant to them.

{BY LOGAN AGUINIGA}

Khari Wilcox '21, of Ypsilanti, Michigan, did not find the perfect college on the first try. Luckily, he transferred to Mount Union in the fall of 2017.

“I learned about Mount Union through the football coach, but I really liked that the class sizes are small, and you get that one-on-one attention with professors,” said Wilcox. “The small campus makes you feel at home. At no other school do you get your professors’ cell numbers and can text them in the evening with a question.”

With his senior year almost complete, Khari emphasized that the people have made his Mount Union experience an incredible one.

“When I think of Mount Union, I think of family,” he said. “The family you build here, not just your friends, but faculty and staff as well are really there for you when things get hard. If you want to benefit from loyalty to you and your education, I recommend coming to Mount Union.”

Things got difficult in March 2020 when the COVID-19 virus took hold of the globe and shut many countries down. Khari had a couple of jobs, but said when the world shut down, his work stopped. Khari’s student account had late balances, he had bills to pay, and he was not sure how he was going to make ends meet. He found a job at the YMCA, which helped, and then he learned about and applied for the Student Emergency Fund.

“Receiving support from the Student Emergency Fund was the biggest blessing of this entire year,” he said. “When I found out I received the award, I was relieved. I told my mom, and she was so happy.”

Khari wanted to say “thank you” to those donors who made the Student Emergency Fund possible.



Khari Wilcox '21
Ypsilanti, Michigan | B.A., Sport Business

“You are truly blessing other people’s lives,” he said. “You’re helping college students get through school. You are helping me get through school and get through life. Thank you.”

Khari has one piece of advice for his fellow Purple Raiders: “Don’t ever be ashamed to ask for help. If you need help, ask for it. You will be amazed at the support this community has to offer.”

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- Khari Wilcox '21



Kayla '21 and Valerie '21 Sitler

Leetonia, Ohio | B.S., Human Development and Family Science | B.S., Nursing

Though identical twins Kayla and Valerie Sitler both fell in love with Mount Union, they have blazed two unique trails while on campus, and are looking forward to helping others in their respective fields of study after graduation.

Originally from Leetonia, Ohio, the sisters have driven past Mount Union many times, but did not give the University much thought until they visited campus during their junior year of high school. Both Valerie and Kayla felt at home during their time on campus.

“I am a shy person, so the small classes appealed to me,” Kayla explained, “I didn’t want to get lost in a crowd of people at another school. Plus, everyone I met here was so friendly.”

Valerie, a nursing major, said she has always wanted to find a profession through which she could help other people. Being a quiet person, nursing intimidated her at first.

“Mount Union helped me break out of my shell. After my first semester, I felt more confident to pursue nursing,” Valerie said. “That was the best decision I could have made. I absolutely love the program and my cohort.”

While Valerie thrives in the nursing program, Kayla was drawn to psychology after taking a class during her second

semester as a Purple Raider. She will work to become a clinical mental health counselor after graduation.

At the end of the Sitler sisters’ junior year, COVID-19 shifted everything. They found themselves learning completely online like the rest of the world and missing the campus with which they fell in love. Worse yet, Kayla and Valerie were both unsure of how they were going to pay for school. Kayla said they thought they might have to stop going to school for a while to save up money to return.

“With everything going on in school and the world, I was trying so hard to focus on my classes, but the stress of paying for them was overwhelming,” said Valerie.

They then learned about the Student Emergency Fund. Kayla and Valerie each reached out to ask for help and were made aware of the fund created to help students like them. They each applied and received the aid.

“I did not want my time at Mount Union to be interrupted. Thanks to the Student Emergency Fund, it wasn’t,” Kayla said. “I felt so relieved to learn we received the money. A lot of times, you feel alone when you encounter a big life challenge. To know that there are people out there who really care about my sister and me finishing school was the most amazing feeling.”

Kayla and Valerie are looking forward to using their Mount Union educations to impact their community.

“This gift will have an enormous impact,” Valerie said. “I will be able to help so many patients in the future because I was given this help. I would never have been able to impact those people if I had not come to Mount Union. I am looking forward to caring for my patients and paying this incredible gift forward.”

“A lot of times, you feel alone when you encounter a big life challenge. To know that there are people out there who really care about my sister and me finishing school was the most amazing feeling.”

- Valerie Sitler '21

Christian Lopez '21 committed to Mount Union without ever having set foot on campus.

“I knew I wanted to play football at a Division III school. What better place than Mount Union?” Lopez asked.

Lopez first came to Alliance from his hometown of Deltona, Florida for football training his freshman year. He loved playing Purple Raider football and is also extremely grateful for his experience off the field.

“My favorite thing about Mount is all the connections I have made on campus,” said Lopez. “The relationships I’ve built in admission and with faculty and staff all mean so much to me.”

The youngest of five children and a first-generation college student, Lopez works diligently to support himself. When the pandemic hit, he struggled to make ends meet. His student account and bills quickly piled up. He went to financial aid to see what options he had, applied for the Student Emergency Fund, and received aid for his circumstance.

“I was ecstatic to learn I received some of the funding. The financial burden being lifted off my shoulders allowed me to focus on school,” Lopez said. “I’m so thankful to those who made the Student Emergency Fund possible. They’ve helped more than just me since I am working to pave the way for my family members and future generations. Their impact is greater than just my journey.”

Lopez was excited to complete his human resource management major and pursue a master’s in educational leadership. He wants to be in a position to help others.



Christian Lopez '21
Deltona, Florida | B.A., Human Resource Management

“Mount Union has helped me grow tremendously. When I came here, my biggest concern was sports,” Lopez said. “Now, I’m organized. I take responsibility for myself. The way people around me have influenced me, had my back, and supported me – it makes me feel at home. I am so happy I chose Mount Union.”

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- Christian Lopez '21

