



Michael Traversa
Benedictine University
McGraw Foundation Emergency Financial Aid



Michael Traversa is working in jobs he had hoped for after graduating from college. Now a strength and conditioning coach at [Benedictine University](#) and Morton College in the Chicago area, Traversa says he's grateful for opportunities to work in his chosen field so soon after college. "That was the goal," he says. "I just didn't think I'd be so lucky that fast."

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Traversa explains that he and his four siblings were raised by their maternal grandparents. They made it possible for them to attend Catholic primary and secondary schools. After graduating from high school, Traversa started college at a Chicago-area

university, but says he didn't do well academically. He left and took two years off from school before starting at Benedictine University in Lisle, Illinois, in 2015.

"The reason I wanted to go to Benedictine was growing up in Chicago, there were a lot of distractions," Traversa says. Benedictine was a good choice, he says, because it offered a new experience and it was close to Chicago and his family. He was also attracted by Benedictine's exercise science and football programs. Traversa played on Benedictine's football team for two years, most recently as a lineman and tight end. During his senior year in 2019, Traversa was presented the Tom Wirtz Award for Courage and Integrity, one of Benedictine's top awards for student athletes.

While he was a student, Benedictine University helped Traversa with scholarships and grants, but he didn't have quite enough to pay for tuition in his senior year. Someone in the financial aid office recommended Traversa apply for an emergency financial aid grant from the McGraw Foundation, through ACI. With that extra help, Traversa finished and graduated in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in exercise science and sport studies.

"I actually was the first one to finish college in my family," Traversa says. "I wouldn't have been able to do that if it wasn't for all the help that I got from Benedictine and I got from the McGraw scholarship ... I'm very thankful and very appreciative."

Working as a personal trainer while at Benedictine helped Traversa gain experience in strength and conditioning, and to make professional connections. He credits people such as Matt Saey, head strength and conditioning coach at Benedictine, for opening doors to opportunities.

Scholarships are "incredibly important" for some students who need financial help that helps them earn degrees, Traversa says. "I hope that I can end up making enough money one day to give money back to students," he says. "That's what I would do because I see how important it is. It really truly is so crucial to some people's lives."