



Justin DeLeary
Illinois College
McGraw Foundation Emergency Financial Aid



Justin DeLeary is a history major at [Illinois College](#). He hopes one day to become an archivist for a museum, or work at a historical site. But his college plans were nearly derailed in late 2019. In the middle of his sophomore year, his mother died of ovarian cancer. That isn't the end of the story, though. With the help of an emergency grant from the McGraw Emergency Financial Aid Fund through ACI, DeLeary, Midlothian, Illinois, was able to remain in college and continue his education – honoring his mother's wish that he finish college and earn a degree.

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DeLeary, an only child, spoke to his maternal grandmother about his future after his mother's passing. "It was either don't go back to school, find a scholarship or you might have to take out a really big loan," he said of the conversation. "So, getting this grant really helped me. I was able to come back to college because of this grant. Without it, I don't think I would have been able to come back." Also helping DeLeary meet college costs are a few other grants, scholarships and subsidized loans from Illinois College, he said.

DeLeary chose to attend Illinois College, the same college a favorite history teacher from his high school, Freeburg Community High School, attended. He is the first in his family to attend a four-year college. DeLeary's father and mother briefly attended community college classes, but neither finished, he said. His interest in history stems from writing and research, two things he does well, plus an 8th grade trip to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. His minor is education.

At Illinois College, DeLeary attends classes and plays on the college's football team, where he is a defensive end. He also spends a lot of time in the school's archives, working with Dr. Jenny Barker-Devine, associate professor of history and department chair. His dream job would place him in a museum interacting with visitors or teaching young children. "If I can work in a museum and use both majors and teach them about the wonders about why a museum is important, I feel like that would be awesome," DeLeary says.

"I just want to say thank you," DeLeary says to ACI donors. "Without that money, I probably wouldn't have been able to go back to school. I know my mother thanks you. I know my grandmother thanks you, and I most definitely thank you."

"I'm a kid from the rural side of Illinois," he continued. "I was blessed to be able to go to college, and do something I love, every single day. Thanks to the McGraw Fund, the emergency fund, I was able to continue following my dream and graduating college."