



**Mia Pitts-Hope**  
**Wheaton College**  
**McGraw Foundation Emergency Financial Aid**



Mia Pitts-Hope, a first-generation college student, arrived at [Wheaton College](#) four years ago with important goals: Earn a college degree and begin a career with Nike, a company she dreamed of working for while growing up Denver. Pitts-Hope, a communication major at Wheaton, says, "I want to work for their ad department, making their ad campaigns, like in a magazine, TV and the commercials. I love Nike. Basketball and Nike were a big part of my childhood growing up."

Pitts-Hope, the youngest of three children, was home-schooled. Her tutor encouraged her to apply because the tutor's daughter attended Wheaton. "When I got in, I was really shocked," she says. "But then the aspect of 'can I afford it?' came into question. Because I applied mostly on a whim, not because I knew I could go there." Pitts-Hope could not afford a campus visit when she was admitted. Her first visit was during freshman orientation. Fortunately, she earned scholarships that made it possible for her to attend Wheaton, where she has made some lifelong friends.

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Pitts-Hope was raised by her maternal grandmother, a source of inspiration, plus family and financial support. "My biological parents couldn't do it at the time, so my grandmother stepped in. I was very little," Pitts-Hope says. "She took care of me. She was very much like my best friend, my confidant. I would call her for everything. I spent a whole bunch of time with her." Her grandmother passed away suddenly last November in the midst of the pandemic, the result of an aneurysm. Pitts-Hope has also faced other tragedies while attending Wheaton. Three weeks into her freshman year, her father died. Earlier this year, an uncle died from brain cancer. Through all of the losses, and her own health concerns, Pitts-Hope says Wheaton College faculty, staff and students have graciously supported her.

As an independent student, she has faced the financial realities of college tuition costs. In need of tuition funds, Pitts-Hope asked Karen Belling, Wheaton College director of student financial services, if there were scholarship or financial aid opportunities available. "I just needed a sign of life because the expenses were starting wear me down," she said. "My savings were starting to wear down as well. I wanted to be fully independent and support myself."

Fortunately, Pitts-Hope was awarded a grant from McGraw Foundation Emergency Financial Aid through ACI. "When that grant came in, It really just ... I mean, I just sat at the computer just in shock," she said. "This is the hope that I was praying for. In that moment, I was like, 'my life has been changed.' It really has been a blessing. I can continue to work hard and can continue to strive, and I can continue to apply for these things so that I can continue to get my education." In the future, Pitts-Hope said she wants to earn a doctorate.

This past summer, she was a mentor with Bridge, a college-readiness program at Wheaton College for high school students from Chicago. During the school year, Pitts-Hope is a technician with Wheaton's institutional technology department, helping to solve IT-related issues on campus. She has been the public relations manager for the William Osborne Society for Black culture. She also participates in Koinonia for promotion of Asian cultures and Unidad Cristiana, a Christian organization that promotes Latino cultures.