

Spencer Guercio

Rick and Josh Kemp Memorial Scholarship

HOMETOWN: Buffalo Grove, IL

MAJOR: Civil Engineering

CLASS: Senior



ABOUT ME: I used to attend school at the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater where I was an undeclared major. I had zero idea of what I wanted to do while in college. My Mom suggested that I take some engineering classes because she said I would like them (all I have to say is Moms are always right). I was always fighting the idea of going into a STEM-related field, solely because I thought I was not smart enough to be in the STEM field. However, I was very wrong. I loved all the physics, engineering, and technical classes that I took at UWW; they pushed me intellectually in ways I did not even know. They were challenging me to think outside the box and come up with solutions to problems that did not have a normal cut-and-dry answer. When I began looking up what I could do with an Engineering Degree I was educated on what it means for a school to have an accreditation in engineering. I began to research to see if Whitewater was an accredited engineering school, which I found out it was not. It had a program where a student would complete three years of study at Whitewater and then spend the last two years at an accredited school. This is when I decided that I should just transfer to an accredited engineering school.

I had a friend who was studying Biomedical Engineering at UW-Madison and loved the program. I visited her at school for a few days and went to class with her, to see if I liked the setup of Madison class structure. I loved the campus and city; however, I was nervous about being in a class so big, some of her lectures had over a hundred students. When I expressed my feelings to my friend, she recommended that I look at MSOE because of its smaller campus size as well as class size. The time that I was doing all this research was during the height of COVID-19, so unfortunately MSOE was not doing any site tours just based on the intensity of COVID-19. I decided to just apply to MSOE and see what would happen, I ended up getting in. My Mom and I decided to drive up to Milwaukee and just walk around the campus to see where I was going to be going to school in the fall of 2020. Nothing was open because it was a Sunday and I only walked around the CC.

Now being a senior at MSOE, this school is my home. This school has pushed me to the limits and then has shoved me past those limits. I love the small class size; I can establish a connection with my professor and classmates which allows for better camaraderie. I have learned such valuable information on what it means to be a member of a team as well as what quality work looks like. I love being surrounded by my peers who are smarter than me because they then push me to try harder and achieve the goals I want to achieve academically.

When I am not hitting the books hard to complete my homework or studying, there are a few things that you can find me doing. I can be found in the gym working out or going for a run around campus. I like to be outdoors experiencing the world around me. I enjoy taking walks around Milwaukee and looking for the little glimmers in the world. Such as seeing a flower growing through the sidewalk, or a bird making a nest in the ledges on the various buildings in the city. It reminds me that even when life gets hard and it seems impossible to keep going, that there is always light at the end of the tunnel. If I am determined enough, I can make anything happen. I can also be found hanging out with my close friends on campus, doing homework, going on adventures to 5 Below and Target, playing Minecraft or DnD, or just simply enjoying each other's company. I also try to be involved in aiding the community. I am involved with a program called Stem 2 Stern, which is an outreach program that helps bring both STEM and the sport of Rowing to less affluent communities in the greater Milwaukee area. I also enjoy checking out different coffee shops across Milwaukee!

MY MSOE EXPERIENCE: When I think about MSOE, I think about all the opportunities that I was given to learn at this institution. I was afforded the opportunity to have been accepted to this wonderful institution that is going to provide me with a very rewarding and financially stable future. I have been able to learn from Professors who have real-world experience as well as being exposed to the way the professional world works. I have been given the ability to attend various discussions, panels, presentations, and events that are aimed at showing how to be professional and forward-thinking and how to advance my career in the corporate world. For all of these opportunities, I am grateful.

I have tried to be as involved as I can be on campus to soak up the full college experience. I am involved with various clubs, sports, and programs on campus such as Engineers Without Boarders, Student Government, Triangle, Stem 2 Stern, and most recently the Men's Swimming team. These organizations have had such an impact on the growth of myself as a professional as well as a person.

I would describe my level of involvement on campus as a dominion effect. When I got back from Basic Training and AIT for the Wisconsin National Guard, I was excited to start school again after being away from the classroom and home for seven months. I was starting my second quarter at MSOE in the fall of 2021, and I wanted to join a sport or a club so I could start making friends. I decided to join the men's rowing team. After joining the team, I started to make my friends and

connections. Being a part of the rowing team, I was asked if I wanted to help out with the outreach program called Stem 2 Stern. It is a program that brings the world of STEM and rowing to lesser affluent families. With this program, we would pick up the kids (k-12) after they finished school and would bring them back to MSOE for a STEM session. In these sessions, we would teach the kids how to make rat trap cars, programming, and more. After the kids finish the STEM section, we would bring them to the MRC boat house so they could take the boats out and learn how to row. This is a very gratifying program to be a part of. Through rowing, I met a few people who were a part of one of the Fraternities on campus called Triangle. I ended up joining Triangle which has helped me grow both my professional and social skills in the professional world by connecting me with alumni who are professionals in the workplace. I also just joined the MSOE Swimming Team.

One of the best experiences that I have had at MSOE has been being a part of EWB [Engineers Without Borders]. I joined with one of my friends because he said that I would like it based on the values and ethics that EWB has. The project that I was able to hop on was designing a vehicular bridge to untie two communities in Guatemala. The bridge was going to be built over a part of the river that flood and becomes impassable during the wet seasons in Guatemala. I was able to be on the alternative analysis team as well as the design team for this bridge. Being able to be on this team solidified the type of work that I want to do when I graduate from MSOE. Designing the concrete abutment walls as well as the slab portion of the bridge provide a lot of practical exercise as well as test of my abilities. After coming up with the final design and comparing the other types of the analysis, our chapter decided to go with the slab bridge design. I was then given the opportunity to travel to Guatemala to build the bridge. After flying to Guatemala and driving almost seven hours into the mountains I got immersed into the Guatemalan culture and got to build a bridge side by side some of my best friends and the local community members.

LOOKING FORWARD: It may seem silly, but my biggest accomplishment that I have achieved at MSOE is making it to senior year. I never gave up when both life and school were throwing me around like the watermelon you bought and forgot in the trunk of your car. I am going to be honest, there were times when I wanted to give up; I wanted to just throw my hands up in the air and leave. However, here I am today, in my senior year. Another milestone that I feel that I achieved here at this school is that I learned how to ask for help. Asking for help is such a valuable skill to have in the engineering world as well as in just life. When I started to ask questions and reach out for help instead of trying to figure everything else out by myself, I started to see an increase in both my grade and mental health.

This year, I am looking forward to my senior design class. My group and I are designing a water treatment facility for a village in Costa Rica, and if our design is top notch there is a potential that it could be built in Horquetas Costa Rica. I am excited to design the concrete slabs for our

project because this is going to show me everything that I am capable of being able to do in the structural world.

Looking into the future I want to get both my master's degree as well as my doctorate. I am a first-generation college student in my family, and I want to make my Mom proud. I am going to work towards my doctorate to again show myself that I can do anything I put my mind to. After I graduate, get my master's, and then get my doctorate there will be nothing in this world that I will not be able to achieve. It is not going to be easy or simple, but it will be so rewarding when it is all said and done.

I have been given a full-time job offer with a company called Kiewit to be a Field engineer. I was so happy and ecstatic to be able to work with this company. I worked with them over the summer as an Intern and their values and work ethic align so closely with my values, that it felt like I was not working at all. I hope to be able to learn all I can and advance my career with them post-graduation.

THANK YOU: I have to say thank you. These past two years have been very tumultuous financially for my family and me. This year I tried and tried to get approved for a loan for the balance I owed to MSOE so I could finish up my education at MSOE. My Mom and I applied for the parent plus loan the Wednesday before school started and got approved! We were ecstatic that I actually got to go to school this academic year. My Mom and I would sit behind the computer just staring at the submit button However, that joy and happiness were quickly dashed. The next day I got an email from the financial aid office saying that the parent plus loan was going to be denied due to me aging out of that program. I was crushed. My Mom and I were trying to figure out how we were going to be able to afford school this year. I tried to take out loans from a lot of private lenders but continuously kept getting denied because I did not have an eligible cosigner. The price that I would have had to pay monthly was going to stretch my mom and I too thin to be a feasible option to try and do. I was lost and I was devastated. I thought, "This is it." I am going to have to go to the active army to just survive financially. I would not be able to afford the loans I already had taken out for previous years and would not be able to find a job that would be able to pay for my basic living expenses. I went into the financial aid office as a single last-ditch effort to see if there was anything I could do. I was crying and on the verge of vomiting the non-existence breakfast and lunch that I did not eat. After sitting down with the director of financial aid, and explaining my situation she said, "I think I know something we might be able to do". She told me not to worry about it and that she would not let me not finish my last full year of undergraduate schooling. Later that day I got an email saying that a \$5,000 scholarship had been added to my account by a donor. I broke down while I was out on my run. This scholarship covered the entire tuition that I owed for the

academic year. As I am down by the river, bawling my eyes out, I look out to the lake and say to myself "I get to go to school this year"

I will never be able to show my gratitude or say thank you enough. This scholarship is going to allow me to finish my undergraduate degree at one of the top engineering schools in the state and the nation. This past summer I interned with a construction company called Kiewit, and at the end of the summer, I received a full-time offer from them to work with them post-graduation. This scholarship that you blessed me with is going to allow me to graduate and help pull both my Mom and myself out of poverty. I am going to be able to give back not only to Mom for all the love, support, and dedication she has given me for the past 23 years of my life, but I will also be able to give back to MSOE. I am going to finally not have to live paycheck to paycheck. I am going to be able to do a job that I love and work with a fantastic company. I am going to be able to do more than survive after college. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Because of you and your generosity, I am going to be able to graduate. I hope all your days are bright and shiny!

Thank you,

Spencer Erick Guercio