

Each year Mount Mary offers six full-tuition scholarships to students who accept the challenge of living and working in community, while dedicating 1,200 hours to social justice causes. With 1,190 hours down and 10 to go, here's what one student says about this life-changing experience.



Give back, never give up: Graduating scholar reflects on the Caroline challenge

BY AMANDA FAHRENDORF

In just 10 more hours I'll have completed the promise I made four years ago as an incoming college freshman.

I was 17 years old and had promised to serve an incredible 1,200 hours in the Milwaukee community.

I first heard about the Caroline Scholarship, a full-ride scholarship in exchange for volunteering, while on a campus tour. "You should apply," said my tour guide. "It sounds like something you would have a real chance at."

But when I was filling out the application, I didn't know what "social justice" even meant. I just knew I wanted to change the world. Little did I know at the time that this change I desired to make was, in fact, social justice. My passions already aligned with the objective of the Caroline Scholarship.

After I submitted my applications and completed my in-person interview, I was selected as one of the six young women offered the scholarship that year.

To be honest, I hesitated to accept the Caroline Scholarship. I had a few other schools I was still considering. Plus, Mount Mary wasn't my top choice for a school. It was too small, too close to home, and an all-women's institution.

After many discussions with my parents, I chose to accept the Caroline Scholarship. Despite my original doubts, I found that it was the best decision I could have ever made. The fact that Mount Mary was too small, too close to home, and an all-women's institution are among the reasons I love Mount Mary the most.

Three hundred hours every academic year can seem really daunting when you first start out as a scholar. I remember looking at my friend after we went volunteering for the first time and saying, "Three hours down, 1197 more to go!"

I started calling places and showing up to get as many hours done right away in the beginning of the semester. The sooner you can get them done, the less stressful it is at the end of the semester. Also, as every Caroline Scholar knows, going to your service site is a lot easier right in the beginning of the year. You can just get emotionally and physically worn out by the end of the year.

I have worked in a variety of different nonprofit organizations, such as Hunger Task Force, Agape Community Center, Luther Manor, Walker's Point Aurora Clinic, St. Anne's Salvadorian Campus, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Running Rebels, Inner Beauty Center, and the Riverwest Food Pantry.

As it turns out, our work can be really hard. A lot harder than I originally thought. My dad says that after my first year as a Caroline Scholar I lost an extra pep in my step. Not in a bad way, but instead of floating towards an unnamed goal of "changing the world," I walked in a more grounded and assertive manner. I was coming to realize the amount of dedication it really took to do that kind of work.

The endurance of going to my service sites every week, especially on bad days, was a real struggle. The hardest were on days when I was overwhelmed by the largeness of the social injustices that directly affected individuals I was working with. It was through these trials though, that I learned how to persevere despite the challenges.



Amanda Fahrendorf '19

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I still want to change the world - the Caroline Scholarship just provided me with the tools, resources, and overall experience of what the reality of that looks like.

And it doesn't happen with a grand gesture. Instead, I have come to realize that changing the world really starts with the individual. Our work matters to the person in front of us. The person that we are serving that day.

This scholarship has given me opportunities and experiences I never would have been able to have otherwise. I can't imagine how it would have been possible for me to have interacted with so many people, so many different demographics, and learned so much about who I am without it.

I know that moving forward, there will be trials I won't expect. But the people I encountered throughout my time as a Caroline Scholar will be a constant reminder that I can make a difference in the world. No matter how small or insignificant I may think my actions are, I know that I am making this world a better place.

Which is all I ever wanted to do.

Amanda Fahrendorf graduates in May with a double major in communication and Spanish. She will spend the summer in Honduras with the Catholic Volunteer Network. Upon her return, Amanda has accepted a full-time communications position at one of her former work sites, the Riverwest Food Pantry. Learn more about the Caroline Scholar program, which is funded in part by the Burke Foundation, at www.mtmary.edu/caroline.