Northwestern Mutual Foundation makes students’ dreams a reality

A humble beginning didn’t keep Sonia Garcia from dreaming big. She graduated with a bachelor’s degree in biology in May 2010 and is applying to medical schools, possibly to specialize in orthopedic surgery. Inspiration to become a doctor came from her father, who had wanted that life for himself. “He works to give us everything, and I know he’s proud that I am taking this route,” she said.

Though Sonia is grateful for her parents’ support, she didn’t want to rely solely on them. Her scholarship from Northwestern Mutual Foundation, the largest corporate giver in Wisconsin, helped ease that burden. The Northwestern Mutual Foundation provides two Carroll students with four years of consistent and significant support.

When Sonia, of Waukesha, was notified of the award, she said, “My mom nearly cried. I am very thankful.”

Attending Carroll was a natural, and Sonia’s top choice. She was able to live at home, take art and Spanish classes in addition to pre-med requirements, and because of the applied education and personal relationships, “I could talk to my professors as a scientist,” she said.

Sonia did her Capstone research at the Medical College of Wisconsin, through its Summer Program for Undergraduate Research. The 10-week program provides laboratory experience in biomedical science, in which the undergraduate works with graduate faculty, students and staff on significant, ongoing research. She described the experience as “a nice culmination” of her undergraduate education.

While Sonia selects a medical school, she works in a local hospital’s emergency department. “I admit patients, update their information, and in general try to make them feel cared for, since I am the first and last person they see during their stay,” she said. “It’s a great experience for me to see the workings of a hospital before going to school. I am using this year off to do a little bit of living, while doing what I can to make myself a better candidate for medical schools.”

Stephen Mayorga knows that you have to work your way up, whether that applies to learning a new financial concept or climbing the corporate ladder. “There are no jumps. You have to work to get stuff done,” he said. A business management major, the Milwaukee native has a passion for health and fitness.

Both interests come together at the YMCA, where Stephen completed an operations internship last year and where he now works as a personal trainer. Though he once planned to open his own gym, after his internship Stephen realized, “With the Y, I am part of something greater.”

These valuable opportunities, and his Carroll education, were possible because of Stephen’s scholarship from Northwestern Mutual Foundation. As a high school student, Stephen was originally more concerned with going to work than furthering his education. It was his older brother Bernardo, who graduated from Carroll in 1998, who helped him realize the importance of college. The advice was supported by their parents, who are “my driving force to pursuing a career,” Stephen said. “They taught me how to be a better person.”

After a five-year journey, Stephen earned his degree in December 2010. He credits Debra Schultz, visiting assistant professor of business, for helping him find his way at Carroll. She helped him narrow his focus and take the right classes at the right time. “She was my adviser and biggest inspiration,” he said.

Deanna Tillisch, vice president of Northwestern Mutual Foundation, hopes the impact of the scholarships will be felt far beyond the classroom, and long into the future.