

Jonathan Keniston
5658 Summerland Drive
Waterloo, IA 50701

Hello, my name is Jonathan Keniston. I am a thirty-one year old student currently attending Hawkeye Community College in Waterloo, Iowa. I am here today because I was asked to tell you a little about my life experiences and how the Pell grant has aided in my educational journey and success. First, I would like to tell you a little about myself. I was born and raised in Waterloo, Iowa, and have lived here for most of my life. After graduating from East High School, I enlisted in the United States Air Force where I was trained as a munitions specialist and military policeman. My service to our country was an unforgettable experience that took me around the world and was instrumental in providing the foundational skills and values that have guided my life since then. Following my enlistment, I returned home to Waterloo in the summer of 2001. After only being home for a month, a friend and I were driving home when we were struck head-on by a drunken driver traveling at seventy-five miles per hour causing serious injuring to me and taking the life of a childhood friend. After being released from the hospital, I had to go through physical rehabilitation. Five months into therapy, I was rear-ended by another drunken driver, causing more injuries which forced me to start the rehabilitation process all over again. The time I spent in physical therapy prompted my initial interest in the medical field and from there the desire continued to grow.

In the fall of 2002, I met my beautiful wife, Emily. Not wasting any time, we were married two years later in the fall of 2004. Shortly after getting married, we were overjoyed by the arrival of our first child, a little girl named, Ellie Jo, who is now five-years old and daddy's little girl. This was the best time in my life, newly married and becoming a new father to a precious little girl. Feeling like I was on top of the world and enjoying my new career as a realtor in the Cedar Valley, I realized how quickly things can change in life with my father's unexpected failing health. He was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. Throughout the next year, he struggled through a brain hemorrhage leading to multiple seizures resulting in a brain aneurysm ending his battle with heart disease. While dealing with the great despair of losing my father, these emotions were overshadowed by the news of expecting our first son who bears my father's middle name - Austin James, who is now three years old. Last, but not least, seventeen months later, our family grew once again, with the addition of our youngest child, Ian Scott, who is now two-years old.

My experience with rehabilitation following the car accidents, the events and complications of my father's disease, and the wonderful experience of the births of my three children, a new desire was growing in my heart to redirect my career toward the medical field. After selling real estate for several years in the Cedar Valley, I wanted a healthier more stable lifestyle for my family with a brighter financial future that only higher education could provide. With numerous responsibilities at this point in my life and changing careers, enduring the financial struggles of achieving higher education seemed almost unobtainable and frightening - to say the least. Researching tuition and the cost of living for my family, the actual expense of college grew exponentially. With the help of Pell grants and financial aid, we were able to make our decision that I was going to attend Hawkeye Community College in the fall of 2009. Committing to school, my wife and I were faced with several critical financial decisions beginning with restructuring our lifestyle, selling our home for a more affordable one and trading our vehicle in for a smaller more fuel-efficient model.

Walking through the doors on the first day of school, I felt nervous and out of place, but I viewed school as my new job with the attitude of - failure is not an option. Jumping in head first, I registered and completed a total of thirty-four credit hours my first year at college. After achieving a 4.0 GPA, I was placed on the Dean's List, was awarded a scholarship this spring, and given an invitation to The Phi Theta Kappa Honor's Society. In addition, I have been accepted into the Radiography program at Allen College in Waterloo, starting this fall following May graduation. The Pell grants have helped me attend school full-time including attending classes over both Christmas breaks and last summer covering the majority of the average full-time tuition cost. The Pell grants provided me with the financial ability to worry less about the cost of college - permitting me to focus on my academics and allowing me to enroll in additional classes every semester enabling me to graduate sooner. The money that I have received from the Pell grant program has lessened my fears of leaving college with only student loans and no degree. These funds make the dreams of obtaining a college degree more realistic even with the cost of higher education continuously increasing. With both my wife and I currently taking advantage of Pell grants, it has relieved an enormous financial burden off our family making it possible for my wife to pursue a career as a dental hygienist.

My future plans and goals are to graduate from the Radiography program at Allen College, and then attend The University of Iowa to seek a bachelor's degree in radiation science, and enter a master's degree program. I have proven myself through adversity and challenges in my past to get to this point in my life and I will continue to press forward toward my goals and aspirations. If the Pell grant program funding is cut dramatically, coupled with the rising cost of tuition, I feel that my college educational goals will be driven further out of my financial grasp. The reduction in Pell funding would also restrict my family by allowing only one of us to attend college part-time, greatly extending our time spent in college, and limiting my financial ability to support my family and further my educational goals in completing my bachelor's and master's degrees. Thank you.