

Hezekiah Brady Jr. Scholarship Essay

I never understood how unique my background is until starting University in a large town. I am from Kankakee, IL; my parents being from the same town. My father grew up in Hopkins Park and St. Anne, IL; Hopkins being a place that I still call home and rave to my new friends about. My parents graduated high school but neither went into higher education to receive a degree; I will be the first of my parents' children together. This drives me to do my best to provide a life for myself that not only can I be proud of but my parents and future children too; to live a life that inspires others like me.

As I end my first year at University, I have gained a lot of knowledge about what I want to do in my future and my career; I have also become involved on campus with the hopes of doing more. I currently work two jobs, one as a Cook for a nursing home and the other working for Illinois State Athletics; checking bags and ensuring public safety guidelines are met. During my first year at Illinois State University, I volunteered with the *Center for Civic Engagement* to clean up our campus, keeping it clean and beautiful. As a part of a class project, my group and I created a *Take One, Leave One* library for the local YWCA where students can visit their garden and read books with the hopes of combating the ever-growing literacy crisis in America now.

I have also joined the *Student Wellness Ambassadors Team*, a club on campus that advocates for student wellness by providing resources weekly and hosting weekly meetings where we present and discuss wellness topics such as sleep, gut, and holistic health etc. I am a general member of the group P Power, where we discuss women's empowerment and foster a safe space for women to express themselves and share stories that they otherwise have felt unsafe or uncomfortable sharing. I am also a member of the *Illinois State University Black Student Union*, I have recently been elected to the *Black Student Union 2024-2025 Executive*

Board as Community Service Chair. This position is one I am eager to pursue as participating in community service is something I genuinely enjoy and am passionate about. As the 2023-2024 school year wraps up, I joined the College of Education as we ventured down to Springfield to advocate for education at a higher level. At this event, we met with Congress people including Senator Chris Belt, voicing our concerns and advocating for higher education bills to be passed and created. I got the chance to hear multiple speakers, gain fruitful connections, as well as sit in on congressional hearings.

As I continue to gather volunteer experience as well as establish a prominent presence on campus, I plan to do the same with the C.R.A.F.T Organization, this organization has provided me not only with the opportunity to further my education but also motivation through my mentorship and other board members who consistently want and wish the best for me and my future. The way the C.R.A.F.T Organization has poured into me I wish to do the same for future generations to come, telling my story, feats, and accomplishments that they too can achieve.

Involving myself on campus and within student organizations is particularly important to me as it allows me to build necessary skills for the future, I have planned for myself. I am set to graduate Spring 2026 with my bachelor's degree in early childhood education, with that I will start my teaching career while also pursuing a master's degree in administration or something similar that will lead me on the path to becoming a school principal, my end goal. Once my scholarly obligations are fulfilled in Illinois, I wish to move to Washington D.C or surrounding areas to principal there while also advocating for education and children's rights. This desire for advocacy fuels my desire to move to the DMV area but also the fact that Washington D.C has a high Black population and that is who I want to teach/administer. My goal as an educator is to work in underserved, highly diverse areas where education quality is usually lacking and help to be that bridge that most children need to receive a quality, enriched education.