



# **Online Learning Keeps International Student on Track Amid Extreme Challenges**

by Megan Wieser  
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EDWARDSVILLE – The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major challenges for individuals worldwide. Add to the more common trials a volcanic eruption that showered an island country in ash and left it with little running water and power, and then try to imagine pursuing a higher education degree amid it all.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville international student Sorenja Miller has persevered through those very challenges with grace and determination as she pursues a master's in kinesiology with an emphasis in exercise and sports psychology.

“One thing I’ve learned is not to take anything for granted,” she said. “One day it can be sunshine, and the next ashes, literally.

A native of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Miller began her graduate education at SIUE in fall 2020. While the online learning environment of that semester proved difficult for her, she has since better mastered the digital world.

“I aspire to help athletes overcome mental barriers, so they can be successful,” explained Miller, who earned a bachelor’s in psychology from Benedict College. “I chose SIUE, because I was impressed by its exercise and sports psychology curriculum, and I was awarded the Graduate Scholar Award (GSA).

“In the fall, I wasn’t accustomed to the online classes, because I learn better in person and in a small group setting. But, I have the most amazing professors and they adapted well in creating Zoom-based sessions.”

In spring 2021, Miller was awarded a \$5,000 Alumni Association scholarship. The Alumni Association’s annual scholarships support standout students who are selected based on co-curricular activities, community involvement, academic achievement, financial need and a written essay.

“My GSA was only for two semesters and I was unsure how I was going to pay for the tuition moving forward,” she recalled. “I walk by faith, not sight. Being awarded this scholarship assured me that I’m doing the right thing by pursuing my master’s. I’ll be the first in my family to obtain one, and I want to make them proud.”

Miller was in St. Vincent when the eruption took place in April. Knowing it would take time for the country to rebuild, she traveled to her uncle’s home in Barbados in order to safely pursue online courses.

“The spring semester was quite interesting, but I was able to bounce back and use my studies as an escape,” Miller recalled. “Overall this experience is one I’ll never forget, especially the feeling of uncertainty. My heart went out to those who lived nearby the volcano, because they barely have anything to go back to. What kept me sane was communicating with friends and family, and knowing they are safe. I also had many people reach out to me, and for that I am grateful.”

While she has appreciated the opportunity to continue her studies online, Miller hopes to be on SIUE’s campus for the fall semester. She is slated to graduate in May 2022, and plans to pursue a doctorate in sport psychology.

“In the long run, I hope to work with para athletes, and help rebuild the sports culture within my country,” she concluded.

Give to the SIUE Alumni Association scholarship program and support deserving students like Miller, by visiting [siue.edu/give-now/alumni-association](https://siue.edu/give-now/alumni-association).

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville provides students with a high-quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River’s rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of nearly 13,000.