

Connor Keast: Lake Forest's College's Very Own Aquaman, Part-time Athlete, Part-time Aquatic Biologist.

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In his first year after graduation with the class of 2021, we visited Connor Keast in Greenbay, Wisconsin. Connor is often seen out on the many lakes in Wisconsin, being an avid lover of water bodies, their regulation, and the ecosystems that flourish beneath the very water that strikes shore every second. His love for Lake Forest College has seen him driving down to Illinois to see the Lake Forest men's soccer team every other weekend to try and win conference this year. When not in a boat soaring over the lake, he can be seen being vocal from the bleachers at the soccer games. Connor took some time out of his busy schedule to sit down with us and talk about his time here at the college and beyond.

In the year following graduation, Connor is waiting to start graduate school at Colorado State in January. He will be studying freshwater and ecosystem sciences. Currently, he is working with a lake managing firm in Green Bay whilst saving up for graduate school, and he cannot wait to jump into this next phase in his pursuit of academic excellence. He is most excited to have a discussion with anyone who is interested in freshwater systems and their management. Reflecting on his time at Lake Forest College, Keast believes every decision he made helped him enjoy his time, whether it was declaring a second major in his junior year or choosing to play soccer for the college. His left footed banger against Cornell College in overtime for the men's soccer team in his senior year remains arguably as one of the finest goals scored by the men's soccer team.



Keast still remembers vividly taking a human anatomy class in junior year of high school. This class became one of the steppingstones towards his decision to be a life sciences major. His senior year, he took three biology courses, and while studying them, Keast became convinced that the biological sciences were indeed his calling. He had his sights fixed on a major in the biological sciences before he even knew what the amazing faculty at Lake Forest College had to offer for his interests. His decision to come to the college was strengthened when the school unveiled the Lillard Science Center with its state-of-the-art labs and research facilities in his junior year of high school. Connor's mother, brother and sister are all Lake Forest alums, and he needed no further push with the school's sciences departments looking to be among the best in the Midwest.

While at the school, Dr. Menke took him under his wing, and Keast recalls his exceptional mentorship. Dr. Menke would make time to meet him every few weeks, help him in his research, and not only provide feedback, but also provide resources Keast did not know existed. Dr. Menke also helped him with his graduate school selection and the admission process, providing him vital feedback from his own days in graduate school. Keast felt that all prospective biology students should tap into Dr Menke's potential to help and his knowledge. Additionally, Dr Menke was a familiar face at the soccer games, where he would show up to cheer his mentee on.

In all the courses he took in the sciences, he found Bio 221, "Molecules, Genes, and Cells", to be most challenging. It required a great degree of focus, and Keast felt that without his A-game he could have very easily flunked this course. Connor loved his senior seminar course about extinction biology with Dr. Menke. This was a unique course with a great degree of interaction, he believes. It was for the most part taught by the students, and he believes this helped him not only forge some great bonds with fellow students in the class but also become independent in his approach to learning since they would prepare lectures for the entire class and deliver them. Keast had some words of wisdom for prospective biology majors and freshmen starting college, but his advice bears true for everyone in college. Connor could not emphasize enough how important it was to not force the major you had in mind before coming to college. Like him, he believes everybody should use the different courses the school offers in the sciences to discover where your true calling lies. You might end up hating some parts of biology, but they will open up new doors you didn't know existed. He wants everyone to stay open to the idea of finding their passion via a process of exploration and experience. "Your four-year plan is not set in stone," he insists, and hence everyone needs to be ready to adapt. "Live the process, but find comfort in the challenges," he finished off with. We hope to see Keast making Lake Forest proud and wish him the best of luck at graduate school.