

The Journey to Success

Think back to your first day as an Eastern student; did you have any idea how quickly the time would fly by? Think of the accomplishments we made and challenges we overcame on this journey. We wrote essays, took tests, and developed our lives and sense of self outside of the academic arena. In a few brief moments, we will each walk across the stage and leave with our diplomas in hand. Our friends and family who supported us through this journey join us on this day of celebration, joy, and perhaps even relief! We are not the same people we were when we arrived on Eastern's campus. We have a new sense of responsibility, independence, and confidence for our futures. All the people I have met along my journey shaped my life for the better--including professors, fellow students, and members from campus groups.

The professors at EIU not only challenged us in the classroom, but showed us how to apply the knowledge we learned for the betterment of ourselves and others. As a Communication Disorders and Sciences major, I had the privilege of serving clients from the community at EIU's Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic. My professors helped me step out of my comfort zone so I could better see the world through the eyes of my clients, and continually asked how they could support me through the learning process. My clinical introduction would not have been the same without their guidance and support. In the future, I challenge us to reflect what our professors have modeled for us here at EIU. Whatever crosses your path, remember the knowledge, wisdom and passion you learned as a student of EIU.

When I first transferred to Eastern Illinois University, I instantly fell in love with the passion students had for the different organizations they represented. I looked up to the students involved in the organizations and was inspired by the way the student presidents and other

executive board members demonstrated such positivity in their roles. I never saw myself holding a leadership role, but my time at Eastern has taught me that I can affect change in the world around me one small position at a time.

EIU has well over 100 registered student organizations, or RSOs, on campus. Maybe you were a member of a fraternity or sorority or perhaps you served on student government. *Best Buddies*, one such RSO, made it possible for me to meet a diverse group of people from the university and community, including persons with disabilities. One of my fondest memories was bowling with this group while we cheered each other on and danced to Aqua's "Barbie Girl." Wherever this life takes me, I will carry these memories and the lessons of acceptance and unconditional friendship. Involvement with RSOs has allowed many of us to give back to the local and global community and be a part of something bigger than ourselves. Alone we are limited, but a community of people can be powerful. I am reminded of a mission trip I went on 4 years ago where I met an amazing couple. They were heartbroken when they saw the number of homeless children in Guatemala. They made a choice to look beyond themselves and help others by moving to Antigua, Guatemala and founding a children's home. This home began with three children and has now grown to housing over 400 children. This is only possible through the help of those in the community and those willing to volunteer their time, talent, and financial support. By working together we can truly change the hands of fate. Being a part of something bigger than ourselves is a humbling experience that makes us see the world in a more positive and hopeful light.

Let's take a step back; look around this entire room—look at all our friends, family, and professors who came along with us on this journey. Think of all you've achieved here at Eastern Illinois University and what an impact it has made on your life and the lives of others. If we

were able to affect change here at Eastern, imagine how we can shape the world as we pursue our different paths. We are all now representatives of a larger community, EIU Alumni!

Represent your alma mater well. Congratulations class of 2018!