

We Have Been Served, We Have Served, and Together We Will Continue to Serve

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*Explain how your academic and service experiences at Eastern Illinois University taught you to become part of a community, and how you will use these experiences to influence communities, whether it is local, regional or global, in your future.*

Welcome graduates, family, faculty and administration. Today is a very special day for all of us. As we sit in the crowd, waiting to walk across this stage, we have to think, how did we come this far? What brought us here? Where did it all begin? Each of us have a story that has brought us to this very moment. Part of each of those stories reflects back on those who have been of service to us throughout the process. Our families, our friends, our teachers from our home towns, our coaches and our mentors have provided important inspiration to motivate us to a university degree. Looking back to where it all began, to the start of my own academic journey, my 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Mrs. Scanlan comes to mind. From long hours helping me with difficult math problems to confidence in my abilities at the school spelling bee, she was the one who saw my true potential, who encouraged me to succeed, who told me “I could do it”, and who opened my eyes to a world of continuous learning and higher education. We all have a Mrs. Scanlan in our lives, someone whose motivation, belief, and guidance has led us to where we are today.

There are of course those we have encountered during our years at EIU who have served as fellow students, professors, and administrators, who have guided our preparation and who have shaped us towards a smooth transition to the next step in our lives. It goes without saying, that the faculty at EIU truly care about the success and well-being of the students. Their office doors are always open to advise, mentor and listen. With faculty who go above and beyond to help students succeed, they have provided the ultimate service. They have been the glue to our success, opening the doors to growth and opportunity. As we sit here today, our faculty feel a lot like family. We have confided in them, trusted them and respected them. Today, they stand alongside us, still serving, watching as we take that walk across the stage to the start of a new journey.

It is obvious that we have been served during our time here at EIU, but while we were here we also learned to serve- serve ourselves away from home, serve in student groups, in student organizations, in the Greek system, and serve in our community. Those who have worked on-campus or in Charleston have served through interaction, delivery, and assistance. The athletes at EIU have served through teamwork and commitment. The fans at those athletic events have served, providing support, spirit and pride. Those involved in registered student organizations have served through charitable events and many other forms of volunteerism. We all have had the opportunity to serve here on-campus whether it be through Relay for Life, Girls on the Run, blood drives, or food pantry donations. In academic terms, we have been immersed in service learning. We have adjusted to think about someone other than just ourselves.

Even though times have been challenging on campus, students have continued to receive the highest quality EIU education and attention. Part of our education has prepared us for the next step – not just a place in the work force and a career, but a preparation for service to our communities, our state, our country and our world. Some of us may serve in the military (if they could please stand to be recognized), some may serve in our communities through schools, youth sports, food programs, special Olympics, with the elderly or with social services. Others may be a part of national and even international programs to serve and assist others. Whatever the service may be, we have been exposed first hand to an array of social concerns; economic stress, political disagreement, diversity challenges, ethical case studies, and various styles of calls to action. We are ready to take the next step forward, to provide a political voice, to discover a cure to cancer, to invent the latest technology, and ultimately, to make a difference to the world around us.

So what is next as we graduate? While the classroom and campus are replaced by the “real world”, our opportunities to give back will continue to be endless. The challenges we face in today’s society will bring out the inner Mrs. Scanlan that will influence others to look into the future and strive towards their goals and aspirations, that will give us the capability to make a difference larger than any generation before us. Our unique impact on our surroundings will continue to shape us into the young men and women that we are today, and will reward us with great accomplishment as we continue to grow and succeed. EIU has developed our love for service, and our services to each other are what have made EIU feel like home. Home being a place where the people we have met hold a close place in our hearts, where our passion to the community have connected us all together, and where the memories we have shared will remain irreplaceable. As we depart, let us not forget that we have been served by EIU, we have served through EIU, and together we will continue to serve the world.