

Achieving in Taking Risks: EIU, a Place to Grow

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Dear President Glassman, dear Faculty and EIU administration, dear friends and family, and most importantly today, dear class of 2017. Standing here today, in front of you, is truly a dream come true. EIU has given us so much over the past years. It represents a place of knowledge, peace, safety, and learning; therefore, I am very happy and grateful to graduate today from such a great institution—an institution that constantly supports and helps you to succeed academically. It is a place of diversity where you do not have to be ashamed about who you really are; on the contrary, who you are is celebrated and accepted, every one of us is truly EIU.

Eastern has taught me so much over the past two years; one thing in particular is taking risks. As an English major with a concentration in literary studies, my main focus lies in analyzing early American texts and writing about my research. I generally do not do creative writing; in fact, I am not even very creative to begin with. However, every spring semester, we have essay and creative writing contests, and I thought to myself “Let’s risk it, write a short story for children, and submit it,” and that I did. I risked an attempt in the field of creative writing—what an adventure and yet, at the same time, what a positive and great experience I had. Writing this short story taught me how important it is to take risks in life. Trying something new can be scary and frightening, but also rewarding. Nothing comes from nothing. We need to take risks, and like my movie idol Kung Fu Panda once said: “If you only do what you can do, you will never be more than you are”—and then people claim that television does not educate people, when there is so much truth in this sentence. I took a risk at writing in a genre I was definitely not familiar with, and I was encouraged by my professors to submit my short story to the Louise Murray Award for Children’s Literature, and guess what, apparently, there is a creative part in

me after all; I won second place, and yes, there were more than two submissions. I am certain that each and every one of you has a personal story just like mine; a story that required us to go outside of our comfort zone and provided an opportunity for us to grow into the scholars we are today.

My aspiration in life is to become a professor of American literature, and my studies here at Eastern built the foundation for this career. Thanks to EIU and the English program, I know that I am well-prepared and possess the tools to face the challenges that lie ahead. The multitude of academic conferences hosted by EIU and the English department presented me with an incredible platform to gain experiences and exchange knowledge and research with my fellow scholars. Since I had never presented at a conference before I joined the EIU English program, I was, thus, able to become confident enough to present one of my research papers at a national conference at Illinois State University. Not every University offers this kind of support to its students. I was also lucky enough to be mentored by Dr. Angela Vietto, who turned out to be the best advisor one could wish for. Together, we explored economic writers of the 17th and 18th century and analyzed early American novels and texts. In the end, she not only supported me in my applications to Ph.D. programs, but directed my master's thesis, which I hope to publish in the near future. EIU prepared me, prepared us for what is coming our ways—be it graduate school, a job, or a Ph.D. program.

However, it was not always easy for me. As an international student, I faced not only the hardship and stress that comes with my subject, but also the barrier of studying in a foreign language, in a foreign place. Yet, EIU itself, but especially its communities, welcomed us international students with open arms and a big blue smile on their faces, turning this foreign place into a home—and I really want to take this opportunity, in this respect, to thank one person

in particular who helps to make EIU a home away from home for us international students, and that is Marschelle McCoy. Marschelle is the mother of all international students and I know that she rather wants to be referred to as the “best friend,” but, honestly, if you are thousands of miles away from home, you are happy to find a mom in a person. Someone you can always talk to, who helps you out in any way she can. Marschelle taught me so much over the past two years. She showed me that just being open-minded, kind-hearted, and friendly towards other cultures, opens up so many new alleys to understand and grasp the concept of cultural awareness, which is so important these days. Marschelle and everyone in the International Office took us by our hands and showed us the American way of life, helping us to adapt and feel at home. People might think that this has nothing to do with academia, but I am standing here today to tell you that it does. You see, only if you feel at home and you love your surroundings can you truly learn and experience the beauty of academia, since the academic world is also just one great big family. This community-based learning at Eastern represents such an important part in my life. It taught me to take responsibility to spread tolerance, and acceptance, as well as make everyone I influence feel safe and respected. Even though we will graduate today and leave “thy walls and towers,” these values learned at our Alma Mater will guide us on our paths, and I hope that we can continue to live and share them with the rest of the world.

The knowledge and experience gained at Eastern does more than just help me to succeed in my future studies; it will allow me to treasure my education and upbringing, as well as face the unknown world with confidence and a positive attitude. In this regard, I would like to thank EIU and especially the English department from the bottom of my heart for this rare chance and opportunity that a man once, as a child, dreamed about standing in front of his peers giving a speech, and now, waiting to receive his degree, actually lives his dream. Thank you, English

Department; Thank you, EIU.

Dear class of 2017, go out into the world and use the knowledge and values gained in this amazing institution wisely. We have received an exceptional education that will support us in any of our future endeavors and we can be rightfully proud of ourselves and our achievements—
Congratulations class of 2017; we did it! Thank you.