

“Team EIU’s Winning Serve”

Kelly Iden

Bachelor of Science in Business

Good evening TEAM EIU- family, faculty, administration, and graduating Class of 2017:

As many of you know, we live in the Land of Lincoln. Remembered as one of the greatest heroes in American history, Abraham Lincoln once said, “In the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years”. Connecting Lincoln to our lives, will we remember the past four years at Eastern Illinois University as simply four years or will we take with us the four years of academic and personal learning experiences to impact and shape others’ lives? Part of EIU’s mission is its commitment to diversity, student-faculty scholarship opportunities, and applied learning experiences within a student-centered campus culture and the Charleston community. Graduates have enhanced their abilities to motivate, influence, and communicate clearly to become responsible citizens and leaders in the future. Eastern Illinois University strives to make a difference, not only professionally preparing us for our futures, but also personally identifying ourselves, leaving influential marks on our lives.

Flashing back to the first day enrolled in the university, there is a sense of eagerness and readiness to start a new chapter. One never would have guessed the amount of impact a university could leave on our lives. We learned that being a student is not just about personal development and academic growth, but also about becoming part of something more, a community. Communities are defined as a “self-organized network of people with common agenda, cause, or interest, who collaborate by sharing ideas, information, and other resources”. We all created and joined different communities depending on our interests. Whether a club

specific to your major, a member of a sports team, a fraternity or sorority, religious groups, service organizations, or your love for meditation or Harry Potter, being a part of TEAM EIU has provided us wonderful opportunities to become members of communities that we most closely associate.

EIU strives to be unique and make a difference in students' lives through academic opportunities that no other school offers. Instead of sitting in a lecture hall with over 500 students and being identified as a number, we had the opportunity of getting to know our professors and classmates on a personal level, with the student-faculty ratio 15:1. We shared ideas, collaborated, and learned from one another through small group discussions and individualized attention, which enhanced our learning experiences. EIU is a strong believer in diversity, with students and faculty coming from around the world, representing 42 countries. Students are part of different cultures and have special experiences that we can share with each other within our communities. Most importantly, we unify as one, TEAM EIU, and we have the power to make a difference in our communities and inspire others' lives.

As we all represent different communities, I had the opportunity of being a student-athlete and representing EIU on the women's tennis team. Being part of a team, no matter what kind of team, also creates a community atmosphere. We worked hard together, learned from one another, fought together, and built friendships that will last a lifetime. Teamwork is an important element of life, with the power to not only learn from teammates, but also the power to shape and influence teammates' lives. Just as I have the power to serve the tennis ball, we have the power to serve our communities. Teamwork extends beyond the tennis court to the classroom and into student organizations. WE graduate as part of TEAM EIU. It has made us strong, trusting, confident, and enthusiastic about being a part of a winning educational experience.

So now we are here for the moment we have been preparing for since the early days in preschool. We were warned in middle school to take education serious, in high school to realize everything we do will impact our college experience. Eastern prepares students to succeed after graduation; ready to start careers, give back to our communities, be a part of a solution to the challenges of the “real world”. It is hard to believe the wide range of jobs graduates are pursuing and the geographic dispersion that will occur after today. Having had the opportunity to meet and interview with alums while preparing for my career decision, it became aware we are prepared to go as far as we desire. It is obvious that previous graduates take the responsibility of serving to the next level; inspiring and influencing others. Interview questions included “What service activities did you participate?”, “How do you work with others?”, and “Give us an example how you have demonstrated empathy?”. Our fellow alumni have not forgotten the lessons learned through community service events like the fundraisers and food drives, and generally being a part of TEAM EIU’s winning serve that assists others.

We are ready to go be a part of the future. The future will be served by what we as graduates implement through our successes. Thank you family, friends, faculty, and the Charleston community for allowing us to have an experience that is so memorable and valuable. Makes me smile – not because I am leaving, but because I am ready. TEAM EIU leaves the locker room fired up, prepared to win, proud of preparation, and aware of our value based education that assures we will be winners. Just remember to return and stay connected to Home of the Panthers and the finest education in Illinois because as Lincoln always said “In the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years”. Congratulations Class of 2017, we did it!