

There are many moments that I can look back on in my college career that have changed who I am today; moments of change, growth, and learning that have shaped me as a student. Some of these moments include: questioning a major I thought I would be so comfortable in, struggling in classes, and ultimately dropping that major. There was the time I failed a class and times that I had no clue if I was doing what I was meant to do or the time I went on a study abroad trip, and was really forced to be independent. However, there is one thing that has indisputably shaped who I am as a student and person today.

In my opinion, everyone has a mentor. While they may have different amounts of impact or different relationships with each person, I know that everyone here has a mentor. For me, a good mentor is someone who wears so many different hats. They are someone who will push you to grow, challenge your thinking, and force you to see things in a new way. They will be your biggest cheerleader, supporter, and offer you the most feedback on things you are doing well and things you need to work on.

For me, I have been lucky enough to have two mentors here on campus who have done just that: challenged me, pushed me, and supported me through all of my classes and involvements here on campus. My academic turning point at EIU, was finding people to mentor me that have guided my successes.

When changing my major to Sociology as a second semester sophomore, I hadn't even taken Introduction to Sociology yet. However, I knew some of the faculty, I had friends in the department, and I loved the one elective class I had taken. I went into the Sociology office and was greeted not only by the secretary but by Dr. Eckert himself. I told him I was looking to change majors, which for any of you that know Dr. E led to a long discussion about life, where I'm from and classes. He ended the conversation by asking if I had a

faculty member in mind for an advisor; and at that point the only person I really knew in the department was Dr. Gillespie because of his involvement as a Faculty Fellow.

I got an email from Dr. Gillespie a few days later telling me to set up an appointment with him to choose classes for the next semester. After walking in and talking about classes, I asked him about doing an undergraduate thesis, to which he said “of course!”. We looked into the requirements and began working on what would be a huge undertaking and one of my greatest accomplishments of my undergraduate career. Through countless meetings, Dr. G became someone I could trust; someone I can go to for advice, talk to about classes, or talk about what’s going on with me. He reminds me that talking to him is never a burden and that I can go to him for anything. Dr. G, as well as many other professors here at Eastern, truly cares about his students. I know that so many of my professors want me to stop looking at my letter grade and focus on what I’m actually learning in the classroom. They challenge me to look at new ideas and new concepts and critique them, rather than taking them at face value. I know that at first, this was hard for me; but it truly pushed me to learn and to grow as a student. I now go to class wanting to learn and gather new information, rather than taking notes just to pass a test.

These lessons have taught me so much and have impacted my future. By not focusing on the letter grade, I now focus on learning. These relationships with my mentors, have been my turning point to realize that learning is more than what is reflected in your GPA. Eastern puts a strong emphasis on critical thinking, being able to make decisions, service and global citizenship. I have learned about these things and so much more both inside the classroom and outside the classroom. Eastern has given me the tools I need in the future to go on and change the world.

Oftentimes, we hear that learning can also take place outside of the classroom. One of my mentors, Michael King, is my advisor for the National Residence Hall Honorary, which is formed on the pillars of leadership, scholarship, service and recognition. Michael has taught me so much about what it means to be a successful student by applying what I learn inside the classroom to my real life. We often have meetings talking about different sociological concepts and things I learn in class- from gender roles to poverty; he is there to help me process information that I learn and apply it to the decisions that I make.

Michael, much like Dr. G, cares so much about the students he works with. Michael has challenged me to be more accepting, more positive, and more hardworking. This positive attitude and caring spirit is something that I will try to emulate as a future Student Affairs professional.

Both have taught me that sometimes, it's not just about challenging you or pushing you, but rather sometimes all you need to be successful is to have someone who genuinely believes in you. I have been told countless times by both mentors that they believe in me, that things will be okay, and for that I am truly lucky.

Eastern allows each of us to find that mentor. Whether it's a professor inside of the classroom, an advisor in an organization, or even a friend; each one of us has found that person. Now, I ask each of you to remember to take the time to think about and thank that person who has helped you arrive here today.

I know that in the future, I am ready to grow, learn, and change even more. I hope that after your time at Eastern Illinois University, you too are ready to take on all that the future holds for each of us. Without the help of my two mentors, I know that I would not be standing up here, and I definitely would not be who I am today. Thank you.