

## **Home**

**Greta Dieter**

### **Political Science, Civic and Nonprofit Leadership option**

Being a senior in high school and in college have the exact same feelings, you honestly have no idea what you are doing and everyone around you keeps saying, “The best years of your life are about to begin”. It is crazy to think that a few years ago; we were just about ready to graduate high school. I had no clue what I was going to do in college and a lot of my conversations with my family and friends were “What do you want to study? Well what are you going to do with that? Will you make money?” My family told me I was going to make a home away from home, but I didn’t know what that meant and my brain could not conceive the idea of having a home that was not Oswego, IL. Standing here, I realize our years at Eastern taught us how to have a new home plus the instructions and skills to build a home for others. Eastern Illinois University has prepared us to challenge what we and others think. It gave us the confidence to carry out this mission to build community, and the leadership and service experiences to change the world we live in and make our time count for ourselves and others.

It began on that first day. For my fellow students who began fall 2013, you may remember that move in day was one of the hottest of the summer and, it was full of excitement and fear. I was excited to see my room and unpack, for a picture in front of Old Main, or as most people call it, the castle, to make new friends, and meet my professors, but I was terrified to be three hours away, of attempting to share a room with someone, and more importantly, terrified of community style bathrooms. Immediately, my old home comfort bubble was popped. Sitting here, we know that all these fears went away. The distance became smaller, the bathrooms were not as bad as they appeared in movies, and before we knew it we had enough free t-shirts to wear

a different one every day for a year. Plus, sharing a room with someone didn't kill us. On a serious note though, that is when our time in our new home began, and I am not talking about those mandatory floor meetings where we set community standards, I am talking about the friendships and relationships that began, the first trip to Walmart with your roommate, and that first day in a college class. These experiences plus finding new opportunities to be involved, like student government, a sorority or fraternity, or something different, gave us comfort. For me it was finding Andrews Hall council and the Residence Hall Association. These experiences challenged us.

No matter the organization, classes, roommate, or major, we were continually learning about this home without realizing we were also gaining the necessary skills to build homes of our own. Our professors made us feel smart. They trusted us with the responsibility to take on new opportunities in the classroom, like an independent study, which gave us confidence in our field. They pushed us to further our education and career, and pushed us outside of the classroom. Our experiences taught us how to be accepting of those around us. They taught us that group projects are not as horrible as they seem, and working with others is not only important, but vital to the world around us. Most importantly, while we were making our home at Eastern, Eastern was teaching us that a home is about inspiring others, going the extra mile to make their day, like holding the door for someone who is 10 feet away and watching them run as the guilt sets in that you are holding the door open for them. EIU and all those open doors taught us that no matter your age, where you come from, or where you are, we are all in this together. We will continue to use these lessons in our lives. How? We take our content, no matter the science, we take the friends, we take the memories and become engaged wherever we land. From grad school, to law

school, or the workforce we will hold the door open for just one person, we smile or wave at just one person every day and that may just be enough to change the world.

So here we are gathered not as strangers on the first day, but as family still being asked those questions by our real families, but this time we may have some answers. “What do you want to study?” I studied what I am interested in, political science. Why? Because I wanted to follow my curiosity and passion as many of you did, whether that be nursing, psychology, biology, or any other field to make a difference. I think astrophysicist Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson put it best, “In the end, it’s the people who are curious who change the world.” We are the curious ones, but what did we really learn? That Grilled Cheese Wednesday is the best day and with our experiences from EIU, we can build a home anywhere. We will make others laugh, help them celebrate, help them through the good and the bad, feel welcome, appreciated, and give others a sense of belonging, no matter where they come from or any other circumstances. That is what we are going to do, because it is what EIU did for us. So friends and family of graduates, I know some may still be asking, “Will you make money?” I have no idea. What I do know is that because we chose EIU and a major we are interested in; we will do great things. We will build homes wherever we go, no matter how far, and all of us know that no matter how far, we always have a home here in Charleston at EIU.