

Experiencing EIU
Brittany Hart
Bachelors of Science
Communication Disorders and Sciences

Communication is something we take for granted every day; for most of us it comes naturally, but others have to work for it. Imagine what it would be like to not be able to ask for a drink of water when you are thirsty, or ask for food when you are hungry. Imagine relying on your caregivers to understand what you wanted and when you wanted it, and hoping that they make the right decisions for you.

As a senior in high school, I was given the opportunity to participate in the Health Occupations program at Sarah Bush Lincoln Hospital. It was here that I was introduced to the profession of speech-language pathology. Hearing from a number of professionals how rewarding this job was, I decided to really take the time and see what this career had to offer. Knowing that Eastern Illinois University was close to home, I decided to take a day and visit the Communication Disorders and Sciences department. It was here that I would meet Dr. Anthony for the first time not knowing that she would eventually become my mentor. I spent the day observing therapy, and was able to sit in and be part of the therapy as well. Seeing the joy in the EIU students and the children was something I wanted to experience myself. I left that day knowing that all of my questions had been answered. I was going to be a speech-language pathologist, and I was going to graduate with my degree from EIU.

Throughout my educational career, my experiences at EIU have taught me valuable lessons in order to grow as a person. Every day at EIU is an experience, but the turning point for me was the day I led my first therapy session as a student clinician. In the fall of 2013, I

shadowed a graduate student who provided services to a three-year-old girl with cerebral palsy. During this time I was also enrolled in a course that taught me clinical skills I needed to know in order to provide therapy to clients of my own. As part of the learning experience, I took the lead role in conducting the last therapy sessions of the semester. It was my turn to use all of the knowledge I had gained so far and make a difference in someone's life. The morning of my first therapy session, I was nervous but excited to experience what it was like to be the lead clinician. Our goal over the course of the semester was for the child to communicate simple requests by activating a communication device. During the session I gave her a choice of two activities that we would participate in. We danced to music, and read books, but most importantly we had fun. My passion to help others had just grown tremendously in the short amount of time that I was able to help this little girl. I enjoyed each and every moment watching her progress, and seeing the joy that she brought to her own mother. Watching this parent's excitement about her child's progress was one of the most rewarding feelings. At the end of that therapy session, I was overjoyed that I had just taken the next steps to becoming a speech-language pathologist. I knew then I had picked the right career path for myself.

Choosing Eastern Illinois University has been one of my best decisions. Over the last four years, I have learned so much about myself, and because of EIU I have become a leader, an independent person, and a goal-oriented individual. The faculty hold their students to a high standard for a very good reason. They want to see their students leave this university knowing that they will succeed as professionals. It is important as students that we take pride and initiative in what we do, and set goals for ourselves to become leaders. The faculty have always pushed their students to do so, and this is something I am very thankful for. As a student at EIU for four years, one thing has always caught my attention; the faculty truly enjoy what they are doing.

They have a passion for teaching, and find joy in seeing their students succeed. With the help of this university, and more importantly the Communication Disorders and Sciences department, my passion for speech-language pathology has continued to grow, and I have gained the skills needed to successfully enter a graduate program. I had the opportunity to apply classroom content in a clinical setting. One of the hallmarks of Eastern Illinois University, is the dedication of faculty to mentor students in research and internships experiences that allow an integration of classroom knowledge into the real world.

Eastern Illinois University strives for students to reach the goals they have set for themselves. This university provides students with a committed and caring faculty that greatly contributes to their learning experiences. Without all of the resources that EIU has to offer, we would not be here today. Experiences are what you make of them, and I hope all of you experienced EIU the way I did. Today is an accomplishment that we all should be very proud of. Not only is today an accomplishment for us, but it's one for our families as well. I know I can leave here today and truly say that my experience was... distinctly EIU.

Congratulations and thank you!