

Partners

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It seems like eons ago, eight semesters to be more precise, at the very beginning of my EIU career, I had the pleasure of reading a text which went on to permanently change my outlook on the contemporary state of America's and, in particular, Illinois' higher education system. Arum and Roksa's book, *Academically Adrift*, reports that colleges are failing at their most basic mission of placing undergraduate learning at the top of the priority list. It is often said that "we," today's college students, have become accustomed to an American culture mainly devoted to consumption which has led to a market-based higher education system leaving "us" little choice except to become and act as customers/consumers (Arum-Roksa 70, Edmundson 327).

Four years and two degrees later, and in the name of my fellow graduates, I would like to challenge Arum and Roksa's critically acclaimed work. The vast collection of knowledge represented in this room today stands in pronounced contrast to the so-called stereotypical twenty-first century passionless customer/consumer student to which Arum and Roksa allude.

Here at EIU, we have flourished under a personal university community committed to communication, diversity and inclusion. For instance, over the course of my EIU career, I have

come to greatly appreciate my many professors' open door policy. Both my economics and political science professors' willingness to listen to my frequent enquiries has instilled in me the ability to become an inquisitive citizen, an enlightening experience for which I will be humbly grateful.

Well, after four years of diligent work and observations of that same persistence by my peers and you fellow graduates, I know the collection of all our accomplishments here at Eastern Illinois University demonstrate we are not passionless consumers of higher education. Like you, I am not just a customer. And like you, I am not just a consumer. I am fortunate enough to label myself as a multi-national, multi-lingual, compassionate producer of the educational seeds sewn in my gray matter here at Eastern Illinois University. You, my fellow graduates, may not embody my multiculturalism or a skill of a second or third language, but that is no matter...you have proven, with the help of your professors, that you hold same passions of which I do to use your education as a tool for good.

While being very aware of our exorbitant financial investment into our higher education, we have been very devoted to hard work and embraced a unique EIU student culture which values its university's academic and moral character. EIU's graduating class of 2016 should therefore not be referred to as student consumers and customers. Given the sum of our work, from countless hours of community service to nationwide competitive academic performances, we should be seen as hard-working partners in life.

Just like corporate business partners, we take on a great financial risk investing into our higher learning while at the same time putting in the due diligence it takes to successfully

complete our graduation. We can be proud of ourselves; we have overcome differences in ethnical and social backgrounds in order to embrace a culture here at EIU which is not defined by demanding a degree not through consumption, but by earning it through a unique partnership with faculty, staff and peers at Charleston.

I stand before you not knowing whether my Congolese, German, or American background will take me to one of these three great nations or another nearby nation for that matter. My future, like so many of you, is wide open to the prevailing winds of politics, economics, societal demands, and relationships, some of which have originated right here on this very campus.

What I do know is my roots of lifelong learning lie heavily with this institution of higher learning and the opportunity it has afforded me to see beyond these fertile Midwestern fields which creep upon its, and Charleston's, border. I will end with a quote from a famous athlete from Europe's recent past...Paavo Nurmi. Finland's Olympian of the 1920's known as "The Flying Fin," he once said, "Mind is everything. Muscle - pieces of rubber. All that I am, I am because of my mind." Well I am here to say my track and field experience at EIU might contend that those pieces of rubber can alter the mind's work, but Nurmi is very astute and absolute in his belief that we are all that we are because of our minds...minds forged and honed here at Eastern Illinois University. Class of 2016, take note of the Flying Finn's words, and shun the physical limits to our lives; instead, use your four years of cerebral thought to be what you are meant to be...a worthwhile practitioner of what education here at EIU has bestowed upon you.