

We are Capable  
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Maya Angelou once said, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Here at Eastern Illinois University, we have all experienced a plethora of emotions: a mixture of anxiety and exhilaration to attend a new school or start a new internship, curiosity when you found interest in a particular major or club, and fear when you saw the syllabus and wondered if you could keep up. You felt confidence when you discovered your new-found strengths and talents that you never would have believed you possessed, desire to make your family proud, admiration when you found that teacher who saw your potential and inspired you to do your best, and determination to dive into the exciting field of your choosing and submerge yourself into your studies. Maybe you also felt euphoria when you succeeded in passing that class that was initially so intimidating, and hope that you would find your place in this big, busy world.

Those are just a few of the emotions we felt here at Eastern. And we will, without a doubt, feel them again in one way or another in the future. Change can be daunting. Many of us wonder if and when and where we will find the perfect career or path for us. It can be easy to even feel a little lost. However, in times like that, it is important to remember what we have learned and to reflect on our experiences here at Eastern Illinois University; how each and every one of us has thrived. We are successful today because we worked tirelessly and because Eastern has cared about our success from the beginning. The faculty inquired about our interests and genuinely supported our goals. Their positive attitudes, shared interests, and endless support encouraged us to discover, to be brave, to do what we love, and to be involved. Every day,

Eastern and the community of Charleston continue to remind us to be kind and give to our community as they have given to us. Whether it be through the faculty's open door policies and their willingness to have tea and chat, or a warm smile and hello from Bernie the cashier in Thomas Dining Hall, Eastern has made us feel welcomed. Eastern encouraged kindness and taught us to embrace our community. EIU has changed us all for the better.

And we are not the only ones who have transformed. While we have been here, EIU has changed too. EIU has faced many new challenges. Even so, the faculty and staff remained positive and always encouraged us to be the best we could be. And just like the faculty and campus have unwaveringly supported us, we have supported EIU. With our joined support, EIU has shown us that panthers do not falter when the going gets tough. EIU panthers rise to the occasion with confidence and grace. We all embraced confidence and trust in our school, and that has made EIU even stronger. In turn, we have grown stronger too. We are the way we are now because of what we have learned from Eastern, and Eastern is the way it is because of what they have learned from us. No matter where we go, we are all a part of the EIU family.

I know that I will always remember how EIU has made me feel: valued, important, worthwhile, and capable. With EIU's encouragement, I have realized that we are all capable and have the potential for success. It has inspired us to utilize our new talents and motivated us to be involved in our school and in the Charleston community. In our own unique way, we all have something to offer. Eastern has made us realize how worth-while we all really are: Someone to invest time and support, someone capable of being whoever they want to be. We can be the people to make discoveries and be leaders in our fields and in our communities. Whether you aim to be a chemist, a teacher, a nurse, an entrepreneur or even a speech language pathologist, Eastern has nurtured your talents and inspired you to pursue your goal. So when you feel

troubled or unsure of your future or of yourself, remember that you are capable, you are worthwhile, and you are valued. And when you go out there and start your career and even start a family, take that knowledge and that warmth that EIU has shared with you and pass those same feelings and values to inspire others.

And even right now, everyone here is feeling a mix of emotions. Many of these feelings you are experiencing right now, your families are feeling too: joy, admiration, and pride. So let's bask in the positive emotions I am sure many of us are feeling in this very moment: self-confidence in our skills that we have spent the past four or more years to develop, gratitude for our supporters who always believed in us and continue to believe in us, love for our friends and families who have joined us on this journey, and courage to embark on new adventures and pursue careers that we love. But there is one emotion I know we will never feel when we reflect on our time at Eastern: Regret. We will never regret our decision to attend Eastern Illinois University because EIU has made each and every one of us who we are today. It has shaped us to be confident in ourselves, to have courage, and to be inspired to support our communities. You might forget exactly what your teachers said, and you might forget exactly what you did in a class or two. But if you ever feel unsure of your future or of yourself, never forget how Eastern Illinois University made you feel and taught you who you are. Remember that EIU has made you feel sure of what you can and will achieve. You felt valued. You felt worthwhile. And you felt capable; because you are.