

The Things that Matter Most are the Things that Last: What educational experiences mattered to you while at Eastern Illinois University that made a difference and will follow you into your future?

Beyond the Books

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Graduating college is a milestone that we have the privilege of experiencing together, in this moment. The degree we receive is more than a piece of paper for a nice frame to be hung on the wall. This degree is a lasting reminder of the dedication, determination, and focus that was required from us during our time at EIU. Your academic success speaks volumes of the type of student you are, and is evidence that you have grown to become well-versed in your field.

A quality education is not confined by the walls of a classroom or by the pages of a textbook; it should be an interactive experience that encourages students to increase their understanding of their chosen academic program. I'm proud to say that Eastern has provided me with the education and experiences I need to feel confident not only as a future graduate student, but as a future professional. Part of what makes EIU such a respected place of higher learning are the small classes, the opportunities for mentorship, and most importantly, the faculty. Whether it be reviewing a paper during office hours, holding final review sessions, or offering career advice, the professors at EIU make it their mission to ensure that their students are well-educated and prepared for the road ahead. Working alongside enthusiastic faculty has assured me that my passion to become a speech-language pathologist is not misguided. Each of them has taught me the importance of maintaining intellectual curiosity, causing me to grow and strive each day to be a better person, student, and speech-language pathologist than the day before. The faculty here have inspired me to persevere when faced with any challenge, and view it as a learning opportunity rather than an obstacle. Eastern is truly blessed to have educators that respect us as students and care about us as individuals, making the academic journey meaningful and memorable. They become more than just our professors; they are people we turn to for advice, look to for support, and in some cases, consider part of our family. In fact, I told my clinic supervisor, a woman who has impacted my life in more ways than one, that I sometimes consider

her to be my cool, trendy aunt. I've learned more than I ever imagined I would, and I have outstanding educators and mentors to thank for that.

Along with the valuable information the faculty impart on us, we also learn important life lessons through involvement on campus and being a part of Eastern's diverse community. Before coming to college, my friends consisted of people that had lives very similar to my own; we were usually involved in the same activities, had the same interests, listened to the same music, and had similar personalities. After coming to EIU and being involved in campus activities, my understanding of others has changed. By being involved in Greek life, participating in the music department, working for New Student Programs, and giving campus tours for Admissions, I have interacted with hundreds of different students. College has taught me that differences in opinion, personality, and interests are part of what makes the world so diverse; just because someone may have goals different from my own does not make their goals wrong, it simply makes them different. Being prepared to face the future means being prepared to live and work in a diverse environment filled with interesting people, and our experiences at EIU have more than prepared us for that. In the field of speech-language pathology, we are consistently reminded that each client will be different from the next; it is our responsibility, as professionals, to provide quality services tailored to the needs of each individual. Life is the same way; each person we encounter will be unique, and it is our responsibility to be respectful of them, regardless of their differences. Eastern has allowed me to grow an appreciation for the fact that each person has a story, and each person deserves to have their story told. When we accept each other as unique individuals, we empower ourselves to be confident, happy, positive human beings.

Ultimately, being a member of the EIU community has shaped me into the person I am today. College has brought about many positive changes in my life, and I am sure it has done the

same for all of you. While this may be the ending of one chapter, it is the beginning of the rest of our lives, and Eastern has helped me decide how I want to spend it. I have decided that I will do at least one random act of kindness each day. I have decided that I will appreciate the stories and diversity of all people I meet. I have decided that I will make an effort to step outside my comfort zone. I have decided that I will be more appreciative of my family and friends. I have decided that I will strive to be the best speech-language pathologist I can be. Most importantly, I have decided to positively influence the lives of others, just as EIU has done for me.

Today, I want to challenge all of you to decide how you will continue the journey you started at Eastern. Imagine your life as a book, and EIU is now its own chapter; the relationships you've built, the lessons you've learned, the connections you've made, and the knowledge you've gained have all made a lasting impact and will be a part of you for years to come. Take those experiences as you write the next chapter and be passionate about something, because what matters most will be how you let your journey at Eastern influence your life. We are now, and will always be, EIU.