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College of Sciences

As an avid Facebook user, I cannot deny that I watch a ridiculous number of videos. Prior to starting college, I recall one such Facebook video that stuck out to me, and remains extremely vivid in my mind even four years later. In the beginning of this video, 28, 835 jelly beans were dispersed on the ground. Each jelly bean represented a single day of a person's life. Some individuals may have more jelly beans than others, some less, but the jelly beans represented the average number of days in a human life. The narrator of this identified the number of days we spend completing specific tasks such as sleeping, preparing food, and watching television, and removed those jelly beans from view.

If you were to ask every graduate here how many jelly beans accurately represents their time at Eastern Illinois University (EIU), you would receive a multitude of answers; Many students in this room attended EIU for 4 years, and some students transferred to EIU and spent a few short years on campus. I can guarantee that these students would tell you how Eastern Illinois University has changed them for the better, regardless of how few or how many jelly beans represent their time at EIU. While at Eastern Illinois University, we had the opportunity to become more than students - we became members of the Charleston community and members of the diverse, welcoming, and thriving EIU family.

There is nothing more warm or welcoming than hearing staff members cheerfully exclaim, "it's a great day to be a Panther!", and not even Grilled Cheese Wednesday at Taylor

Hall compares to the excitement on the face of a community member when Eastern Illinois University students show up to volunteer at a local event. Being at EIU taught us the importance of community service, hard work, and to always embrace those around us – regardless of our similarities and differences. Regardless of what is happening in the world, individuals will always be treated with respect, dignity, and compassion here at EIU. I think President David Glassman may have said it best in a recent email, stating that it is Eastern Illinois University’s “commitment that all individuals feel welcomed, accepted and at home.”

Eastern Illinois University is a family. Family is there to support each other, push each other, and perhaps most importantly, learn from each other. Every single day on EIU’s campus, I felt challenged, motivated, and supported by my professors and fellow classmates. Still, the enormous amount of knowledge I obtained in the classroom still falls short in comparison to the knowledge I gained outside of the classroom here at EIU. As the former Speaker of the EIU Student Senate, I saw student senators attend diverse events across campus to learn more about their peers. As part of the Greek community, I had the opportunity to see the women of my chapter attend philanthropic events because they value the importance of support and acceptance of others. Support and acceptance – perhaps the two best words to describe the diverse Eastern Illinois University Panther family.

The Eastern Illinois University family extends from campus and into the community of Charleston. As an individual who is not from the local area, I recall being truly amazed at the numerous community service opportunities in Charleston that were offered to EIU students. As I started branching out into the community to volunteer at these events, I realized how important EIU is to Charleston and vice versa. I recall the quote, “Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about

the kind of community you want to live in.” I do not believe there is a more accurate explanation of how Eastern Illinois University and the city of Charleston rely on and support one another. Not only has EIU shown us how time, effort, and intense passion can transform a community, but also how to we can make contributions in the communities we will be a part of in the future.

The jelly bean video ends by stating that after work and daily activities, a person has approximately 2,740 jelly beans remaining. That is only 2,740 days to effect change in our families and in our communities. How do you plan on spending this time? How much of it have you already spent worrying instead of laughing, or stressing instead of doing something you love? Clearly, I have already wasted some of these jelly beans watching Facebook videos, but what I can tell you about myself and every Eastern Illinois University graduate is that although we may all spend our days differently, every day from here on out will have more quality because of our time at Eastern. We will work harder in our communities, we will love people more selflessly and we will be more accepting of those we encounter. To paraphrase what Aibileen Clark said in the movie, *The Help*: you are kind, you are smart, you are important. The faculty, administrators and staff at Eastern Illinois University have worked tirelessly to imbed these simple truths into all EIU graduates. You are kind, you are smart, you are important. Now take what you have learned at Eastern Illinois University and spread it to every community you encounter. Use your days wisely, and never forget what you have learned during your time at EIU.