

“Change”
Jalisha Smith
Human Services and Community Leadership

When I first stepped foot on campus at Eastern Illinois University (EIU), my immediate thoughts were, “I cannot stay here! I am going home.” There were cornfields to my left and right, a handful of restaurants, one movie theater 7 miles away in the next town over, and not a Target shopping center in sight. Coming from Chicago, this was a lot to take in for an incoming freshman. How was I going to survive? Yet here I am, five years later, have earned a Bachelor’s Degree and am receiving my Master’s Degree in Human Services Program Administration today!

Within my first few months at EIU, I quickly learned that I was not going to be able to breeze through things as I did in high school. Having a history of relatives who received a higher education, one would think that I would have it all figured out, right? Wrong! I received a 42% on my first college exam. This is not to say that I was a bad student, rather what worked for me in high school did not work for me in college. To make matters worse, this was a course within my major. Clearly, there were some habits I needed to change.

Being a student athlete did not make it any easier. Trying to figure out how to manage school, workouts, and my social life was quite the task. As you can imagine, shortly after I found out I failed my test, I received a phone call from my head coach. My coach told me that I better get my grades together or I would not be dribbling a basketball anytime soon. Needless to say, I received the highest score on my next exam. Thanks, coach, for that motivation.

During my time at Eastern, I have experienced many changes. I was challenged academically, athletically, and socially. While playing basketball for Eastern I experienced a coaching change. Just when I had become accustomed with the way things worked, I had to

prepare for an entirely new coaching staff with different styles. The same thing happened with my teammates. As soon as I would get used to having them around, they decided to leave. With so many people coming in and out of the University, I could have easily decided to leave. Instead, I stayed through all of the seasons and changes; I am so glad I did, and I am glad each of you did too.

Adapting to those changes helped me to grow into the person I am today. Being at EIU has helped me to understand that nothing ever truly remains the same. Change is inevitable, and the adaptation skills and resilience I built here at EIU will help me throughout my professional career. I think experiencing change is all a part of growing up, and we all had to grow up when we decided to come here. We did not have teachers or high school administrators forcing us to go to class, our parents no longer made our doctor's appointments, and it was time to say goodbye to home cooked meals. Throughout my experience here I have learned that things may not always turn out the way you expect them to. You have to be willing to adapt to whatever situation you are presented. In my case, I had to be motivated enough to go to class on my own. I had to call health services to schedule a doctor's appointment, and when I wanted a home cooked meal, I settled for Domino's pizza.

Through all of these changes there is one thing that remained the same: support. While being at EIU I have received constant encouragement and motivation from my friends, professors, coaches, teammates, and the Charleston community. There were always people challenging me to think outside of the box. Continuously hearing people tell me that I am capable of more, I am going to be something special, and that I am going to change the lives of others was quite refreshing.

EIU truly embodies the idea of family. Everyone literally has a “we are all in this together” mentality. I am so thankful for people like Cindy in the academic center, Professor Gillespie, Dr. Bowers, and Dr. Murphy. Such people have made my time at Eastern a little more comfortable. They are a few of the people that helped me to realize that I can do anything I set out to do.

I share my situation with you all today to emphasize how Eastern has taught me to embrace change. Some of the best advice I received from one of my coaches was to only focus on what I can control, accepting the things and the people I cannot. I have come to realize that this not only applies to basketball, but in everyday life. While you may not be able to control some of your circumstances, you can control how you respond to them. In life, we are bound to undergo many changes, but how we embrace those changes is what gives us peace, opportunities, and makes life a little more interesting. Class of 2019, as we prepare for our next phase in life, I encourage you all to embrace the change you are faced with. We could not control the fact that we were surrounded by cornfields, but I believe we are here because we accepted it. I have come to love the friends, coaches, and professors that also embraced change, and we made it! I am excited to get to continue to learn things in life like my coach taught me with this lesson.

As I close, I just want to say thank you EIU, for the lessons, the blessing, and the most unforgettable memories. I will forever bleed blue. Thank you.

College of Health and Human Services
Human Services and Community Leadership

600 Lincoln Avenue
Charleston, IL 61920-3099

Office: (217) 581-6076
Fax: (217) 581-6090
<http://www.eiu.edu/h scl>



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To Whom it May Concern,

I am pleased to submit this letter of recommendation on behalf of Ms. Jalisha Smith's application to be the commencement speaker at the graduation in December. I had the privilege of getting to know Ms. Smith through courses I taught at Eastern Illinois University (EIU), and I believe she would be an excellent representation of the College of Health and Human Services and EIU at large.

I first came to really appreciate Ms. Smith after having her in a face to face class last spring. She had to miss a few classes because of basketball games, and she always made appointments with me to make certain she had a solid understanding of the course content she missed in this class. Her work ethic, intelligence, and leadership abilities really stood out to me throughout this period. She would say she had a question on an assignment, yet walk in without it completely drafted and ask pointed questions about what she did not understand. She was always in class when she did not have a game, demonstrated excellent communication skills, and is well respected by faculty and other students. Ms. Smith also approached me about mentoring her with an interview. I know the Administrator she interviewed and subsequently worked with at The Illinois Coalition for Community Services. He told me that Ms. Smith was one of the best students he has had in his organization, and he said that she demonstrated a significant amount of leadership to the extent that he trusted her to run the after school program when he was not there. Ms. Smith is collegial and demonstrates many of the professional skills necessary for a commencement speaker.

I would rate Ms. Smith in the top 1% of all graduate students I have had the opportunity to have in my classes with respect to intelligence and leadership skills. She is passionate about her field, as well as her academic training at EIU. I recommend for the role of commencement speaker with confidence. And, I would be honored to mentor her throughout this process. Please do not hesitate to contact me by phone (217-581-6354) or email (jbowers2@eiu.edu) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jill Bowers".

Jill Bowers, PhD, CFLE

Instructor
Family and Consumer Sciences/Human Services and Community Leadership
Eastern Illinois University