

This seems crazy to say but this is the end of my 16th semester here at Eastern. While here I have taken on many roles a traditional student, a non-traditional student, student worker, student leader, and a graduate assistant. Through all these EIU has taught me to be independent, determined, open-minded, and most importantly that I can accomplish more than I ever thought I could. If I had to chose one word to sum up my time at Eastern is resilience. Resilience the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness, the ability to bounce back. Resiliency is a powerful force where we find the power to make lasting changes.

When faced with the challenges of everyday life we must show resilience. The EIU community helped me with this by having the opportunities to grow with like minded people. While here at EIU I took part in various RSOs and leadership roles. Those people became my biggest support system. With these I have succeeded, and I have failed. Yes, I said fail. Failure is something that happens to all of us, it is about how you bounce back from those failures.

My first year at Eastern was nothing short of a struggle. My grades were not where they should have been, I spent to much time appeasing other people, and its where I first began to struggle with mental health. Something I should say about myself is I am very good at hiding my struggles. The following summer I spent a lot of time doing things I enjoy; I took the time to reflect and came back to campus with a new mindset. This is the first time I really understood the importance of mental health and self-care. When I got back to campus, I was still questioning a lot of things. However, quitting was never an option because I did not want to disappoint anyone or myself. I just kept to myself and did the work. Until one day I stayed after class to ask a few questions and my professor took the time to explain to me options that were more in my interest. That day I changed my major. I am very appreciative of the professors within the Geography department, every one of them are kind, helpful, and motivating. I went from struggling to

looking forward to going to class. I was doing well in school again and was finally feeling proud of myself, which gave me the motivation to branch out and thoroughly enjoy the college experience. The following years of school I branched out and enjoyed all experiences.

Fast forward to this past year, grad school! Something that not many people know is during my grad school experience, I also served as a Graduate Assistant, had a full-time job, and had a baby. To say it keeps me busy is an understatement but, keeping my self-busy is what helps me thrive. To most people's surprise balancing all of that was not the hard part, it was when I began to struggle with Post-Partum Depression. I was in denial for a long time about it, like most women are, and honestly made it harder on myself by trying to hide my struggles. Approximately 75% of women struggle with some amount of PPD. I was so upset with myself because I should have been happy because I now have this beautiful little baby. This was hands down one of the roughest things I have been through. Something I will be forever grateful for is my job began a mental health training that I volunteered to participate in. This was a place twice a week where we listened to other people thoughts, views, and advice on mental health. I slowly noticed a change in my emotions and also decided it was time to get some help. I realized that sometimes we can not do things on our own and its ok to need help from other factors.

If there is something that you take away from today, let it be self-care is important and mental health matters. This is a constant battle for myself because I am someone that always does for others. Self-care encourages you to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself so that you can transmit the good feelings to others. You cannot give to others what you don't have yourself. Without self-care we can easily fall into a place of struggle.

When you walk away today, I urge you to find your WHY! What is your reason for doing what you do day in and day out? What is your reason to take care of yourself and be successful?

DeVoss
Commencement Speech

Mine is simple, my daughter. I want her to see someone that overcame every obstacle life has to offer and never gave an excuse for anything. I do it because one day when my daughter is struggling I want her to say “I can do it because my mom did it.”

Each of you walked a very unique path to reach this day. Some of you faced real trauma. All of you faced challenges, disappointment, heartache, loss, illness – all of these are so personal when they strike – but they are also so universal. Jodi Picoult once said “The human capacity for burden is like bamboo – far more flexible than you’d ever believe at first glance.”

EIU is a special place tucked away in small town that can help you build that resilience if you open your heart and mind. This place has taught me that if you open yourself up you can meet some of the most caring, motivating, and inspirational people. EIU has also taught me that building resilience also means trying to understand how the world looks to those who have experienced it differently, because they are a different race, come from a different country, have a different economic background. We all have our own story, and new ones can be written together and that means seeing the value in each other’s points of view.

As you leave EIU and set out into the world, build resilience in yourselves. When tragedy or disappointment strike, know that deep inside you, you have the ability to get through anything. I promise you do. As you move forward remember that resilience is like a muscle you must build it up, and it is there to draw on when you need it. Seek organizations and people that build you. Speak up when you see injustice. Lend your time and your passion to the causes that matter. When you see something that’s broken and there is a lot that is broken out there, go help fix it. As we part today the most important thing to remember is “you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.” Congratulations Class of 2021!