

“Ohana – EIU Means Family”

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Good afternoon my EIU family!

The Disney movie Lilo and Stich introduced a concept that I have fully come to understand during my time at EIU. “Ohana means family. Family means no one gets left behind or forgotten.” These are the same feelings I’ve felt during my time here at EIU.

Families support each other. They encourage each other. And they motivate each other to achieve what we never believed possible on our own. Many of my own achievements, like many of yours, I’m sure, resulted from our relationships within the EIU family.

Coming into college, all of us fear the day we graduate and not knowing what will come next. We fear that all of our hard work, determination, perseverance, and hard-earned dollars will only result in an even more difficult task of finding a job. Luckily, the EIU family allowed me to resolve the uncertainty halfway through my time here. The connections and relationships that Eastern fostered gave me the opportunity and confidence to secure a successful internship after my sophomore year. I am pleased to announce that I’ll be starting my career with the same company in a few months. Never did I think that the biggest fear for any college student would be averted before the stress of searching for opportunities to begin my career occurred.

The support of my EIU family has also encouraged personal and professional growth that I am constantly amazed with. Our fantastic student organizations have given us numerous opportunities to prepare for the professional world and build our leadership skills, in preparation for this day and beyond. Serving as president of Delta

Sigma Pi, a professional business fraternity, I had the opportunities to develop as a leader and come to a full understanding of how team leadership skills complement each other, to prepare for upcoming collaborative situations in my career. Participating in Beta Alpha Psi, an honors fraternity for financial information students, has allowed my colleagues to engage with professionals and alumni from dozens of different organizations throughout the state. Our advisory boards, within the School of Business and Accounting Program, made up of alums from a few years to many decades ago, are constantly involved and willing to help as well. These professional connections are our extended family. They don't forget where they came from and try their best to make sure none of the young family members are left behind. The opportunities that these groups have given us have grown our professional confidence to levels that most of us never envisioned. The comfort of the EIU family has nurtured many of us, as it has me. We're prepared to go into the wider world and lead. We know that if our belief in ourselves should ever waver, our family is always going to be there for help.

The most valuable skill that the EIU family has taught me is perhaps the least obvious. My family has taught me the expertise and confidence to say 'no.' This may sound strange to say that saying 'no' is a positive thing let alone one of the best things I've learned here. But going off to college was scary. There were all sorts of new, unknown challenges coming before you. It's perfectly normal to think that in order to succeed you had to take on mounds of responsibility on your shoulders. But families support each other. Our family here has taught me to work together and rely upon each other. To confide in each other and learn to ask for help when we need it. This support system that our family has cultivated has taught us to know when to say 'no.' To know

when we could not do something on our own! To know that we didn't need to do it on our own. To know that our family had our back and that there were always others to bear the burden of whatever challenge came before us. I can say 'no' because I know I'm not in it alone and I don't have to be, and none of us are.

Finally, I will leave you with the greatest and most precious thing that I, and all of you, have achieved in our time at Eastern Illinois University. This is the aspect of college that I truly never thought was possible. I found a new family in all of us. As I have shown, this new-found family has helped us in numerous, probably incalculable, ways. The love and support that this family has shown us has carried me through the highs and the lows of the past 4 years. It's about the late nights studying with friends or picking your own poison in celebrating after an exam. Its constant presence is always there to remind us that it will be with us, during every milestone in life, beginning when we move out of the house and pursue our own lives. And that's what graduation really is. What it represents. We're grown up now. We're moving out of the house and finding our own way. But the participation in our lives that our family has shown us through our alumni illustrates that we can always come home, and a warm meal will be waiting.

I leave you with this: make it a priority to come home from time to time. Stop in and see how those who fostered who may need your help in the future. When you've grown, taking care of those who took care of you when you were young perpetuates the cycle.

Foster the young family so that it never is forgotten, and no one is left behind.

Ohana