

Adventures in EIU

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Author Sue Fitzmaurice once said, “You must go on adventures to find out where you belong.” It may not be where you come from, or even where you may end up, but sometimes, we find ourselves connected to the least likely of places that have given us something to cherish forever.

I come from an incredibly small town in Central Illinois - so little that if I did anything wrong at school, my parents would somehow find out even before I made it home. My class size from kindergarten to high school senior ranged between ten and thirty-six students; I knew everyone by their full names, what clubs they were in, their weekend jobs, and even what car they drove around town. In a town that rarely changed, every day was the same old story. You could say I was *comfortable, secure*, and felt I did not need to take significant risks, but everything changed as soon as I was accepted to Eastern Illinois University.

Coming to EIU was like a homecoming in a sense. Many of my high school faculty went here for their teaching degrees, plus my aunt for math. Also, my father attended back when Sean Payton sat in his math class at Old Main. The campus and class sizes were perfect, which made it easier to socialize with my peers and for my professors to know my name. I was not just a number – I was a *person*, with thoughts, ideas, and passions. Aside from that, I came to EIU with a clean slate. The only people I knew on campus upon my arrival were my cousin, who worked at the library, and my roommate from Michigan. It was intimidating to come to a brand-new place, not knowing what to expect, but looking back, it was the best four years of my life.

Much like every freshman’s first time on campus, I was a bit overwhelmed with the responsibility of being off on my own for the first time in my life; yet, it was a new beginning, a chance to figure out who I truly was. I made friends with several women on my floor, plus many others within Thomas Hall and my classes. They helped me see new perspectives, learn new things, and even gave me new interests. It was through the people I connected with that I discovered who I was – someone who desired vigorous relationships with people and adventures beyond borders; someone who wanted to use her imagination to express herself and to make an influential impact wherever she went. Over the years, I managed the now seemingly little time I had and continued to absorb details from every person I met, every class I took, and every experience EIU presented to me.

One of my most significant challenges during my time at EIU took me on a journey across the Pacific Ocean to New Zealand. It was my initial trip abroad, and I did not know anybody going into the internship. Most of the preparation I did before boarding the airplane did not prepare me for what lied ahead. Much how life is, I learned by trial and error. I truly got to see new countries and cultures, and

most importantly, from a diverse viewpoint that I never witnessed before. I can honestly say that I would not have been equipped for this journey had my education at EIU not been in the picture. My classes in the hospitality and tourism program pushed me to understand the industry and seek out answers to underlying issues. EIU strengthened my curiosity about the world, and I was more than ready to apply what I learned. I was able to experiment in my field of study by planning the menu, preparing the food, and leading the operations in the Café in Klehm Hall, as well as perform case studies on major hotel companies, explore international cuisine, and learn about employment laws across the ocean.

Thanks to EIU, I secured four internships and led multiple organizations on campus. My involvements taught me about people – we strive to better ourselves even when we do not realize it. We want to break the walls that confine us to revolutionize the way we innovate and perform. During times of struggle, we might have taken a moment to collect our thoughts, or to cry a little in some cases, but we did not give up. We utilized the resources EIU gave us to solve our issues from a different angle and connect with others to learn how to better ourselves.

The students in the Lumpkin College of Business and Technology have had many accomplishments over the years. Many of us interned, whether far or close to home. We competed in sales and robotics competitions, went on field trips to meet managers in the industry, and presented research across the country. Many of us gave back to the community by donating time and resources to make an impact on children, seniors, and business owners in the Charleston area. We built structures to help improve facilities, such as library shelves and wheelchair ramps. Overall, our classes gave us the knowledge we could not get anywhere else – whether it was working with 3D modeling, creating accounting cycles, or running a small-scale restaurant, we *owned* it. Now here we are, either heading off to jobs, graduate school, or another adventure. We are a family, one that might disagree every once in a while, but we conquer the struggles together. Once we go our separate ways, we will always know that we are welcomed back to our alma mater for a visit. After all, EIU has alumni around the world continuing to lead by example. In the future, *we* will be the ones to guide the current students and recent graduates of EIU to chase their dreams and create an adventure of their own.

I think I can speak for our graduates that many of our greatest achievements came from the support we had at EIU. This university challenged us to be our own persons – to lead the lives *we* want for ourselves – *not* somebody other people expect us to be. Author Andre Gide said it perfectly: “It is only in adventure that some people succeed in knowing themselves – in *finding* themselves.” We are the pilots of our own adventure, so let’s go out there and make the most of what lies ahead. *Right* here. *Right* now.