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Graduating Seniors Ready to Take on the World

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Graduating Seniors Ready to Take on the World

In celebration of the remarkable accomplishments of the Class of 2015, we asked a few seniors who and what inspired them, what they never expected to love or hate, and how they managed to cram so much in four years. From the funny to the sentimental, our seniors had a lot to say. Learn how professors, coaches and staff members guided and inspired them; how volunteer opportunities and internships turned out to be pivotal experiences; what they'll miss most about their amazing four years at Illinois Wesleyan; and what will both excite and terrify them as they prepare for what's next. *(Responses edited for length.)*

Diana Bonilla

biology major, Melrose Park, Ill.
Volunteer with Western Avenue Community Center and the Immigration Project

Up Next: Graduate school at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where I have received a fellowship for a master's in science education. I decided this after having volunteered at the Western Avenue Community Center as a tutor for children here in Bloomington. This sparked my interest for teaching.

Favorite Professor: [Associate] Professor of English Alison Sainsbury. I took a literature class with her, "Bad Girls," and I absolutely loved everything about that class. She seemed to really enjoy what she taught and connected things with her own life. She was also one of the first professors to get to know me on a more personal level. She was very personable and relatable.

Unexpected Career Path: I never expected to enjoy tutoring, take education classes here at IWU, or pursue a career in teaching. Taking classes outside of my major really opened the door to possibilities I never thought about prior to college.

Greatest Takeaway: Time management. Through rigorous classes and schedules I have really learned to prioritize and manage my time well—which I know will come in handy in the future!

Inspiring IWU: I like how [Illinois Wesleyan] is working to become a more diverse campus. Being Hispanic, identity is one of the things I struggled with. But I am happy to be a new face in this campus, and happy to see many more diverse faces in the underclassmen, and hopefully in future incoming classes.

Bloomington-Normal favorites: It's a big town with lots to do and with friendly people! Going on runs on Constitution Trail, you always get a nod and wave from another runner. Or even walking to class from off-campus houses, people say "hi" and "good morning."



Diana Bonilla

Jordan Collins

psychology major, Springfield, Ill.
National Society of Leadership and Success, men's track and field team, Titan Orientation Leader

Up Next: I will be the full-time Homeless Outreach Specialist at PATH Crisis Hotline here in Bloomington-Normal. I will travel to local shelters offering outreach services such as housing and benefits, birth certificates and state IDs, and also help with medical assistance.

Unexpected Success: I did not expect to pass "Human Biology: Anatomy and Physiology" because it was by far the most difficult course I have taken here, but luckily I did with the constant help and support of [Associate] Professor of Biology Will Jaeckle.



Jordan Collins

IWU Inspires: I am inspired by IWU for its acceptance of every person from any walk of life.

Words of Wisdom: Value every second and opportunity that you can. Because once it's gone, it's gone.

Favorite Professor: I cannot pinpoint one person as my favorite. Over the past four years, every professor, whether in the psychology department or not, has had an influential role on my success at IWU.

Anh Tung (Andy) Dao

economics and mathematics double major, Hanoi, Vietnam
Mark Israel Research Fellowship

Up Next: After I graduate, I will work as an economic consultant in Washington, D.C., for a firm called Compass Lexecon [a firm providing analysis of economic issues for use in legal and regulatory proceedings, strategic decisions, and public policy debates]. I applied to the company in my junior year but I wasn't accepted at first. The following summer, I applied for the Mark Israel Research Fellowship (at Illinois Wesleyan), and I learned a tremendous amount during the summer about statistical analysis, determined manipulation and also communication skills -- how to present economic words to an audience that is not very knowledgeable about economics. I have been able to leverage these experiences to show how much I have improved over one summer and how better equipped I am to the job.

Choosing IWU: I first knew about Illinois Wesleyan through one of my friends who already went here, and he said to me that this is a very good school. I've made a lot of good friends here, too.

Pathway to Economics: I chose economics because I like the quantitative and analytical side of it. It all started in high school when I started a business selling second-hand books. That's when I first encountered some of the basic economics problems, like how should I price my products, demand and supply, what wages should I pay my co-workers. So I went to college, took some introductory classes, and I loved it, and I've been loving it ever since.

Nathan Douglas

Hispanic Studies and secondary education double major, Monticello, Ill.

Up Next: I will be starting a Ph.D. program in Spanish Literature at Indiana University-Bloomington. I was accepted with a full scholarship to the program.

Memorable Experiences: Academic: When I was able to leave class for a week to go to a conference in Barcelona [Spain]. Social: Driving across the quad the last night of May Term my freshman year.

Embracing the Unexpected: I never expected to fail a final exam. I got a 68 on Professor of History Mike Weis' "Imperial Spain" final while studying abroad in Barcelona. He wrote me a very nice and encouraging note to soften the blow. When I talked to him about it, he was one of the first people to encourage me to pursue graduate school. I have kept that exam for almost two years now, and it's one



Anh Tung (Andy) Dao



Nathan Douglas

of the things that I pull out whenever I need a little extra boost.

Greatest Takeaway: I've learned how to balance doing research, taking a full course load, working three jobs and maintaining a social life. I feel much more prepared for whatever life throws at me.

Bloomington-Normal Favorites: Three-way tie between the Constitution Trail, the Downtown Farmers Market and all the local restaurants.

Liezl Jacobson

accounting major, Vernon Hills, Ill.
Accounting Society, Tinikling Dance Group, actress in student-produced plays

Up Next: Working at one of the Big Four audit firms, Deloitte, in Chicago as an auditor.

Favorite Class: The Japanese language classes, especially with [Adjunct Faculty] Akiko Wilson. I instantly fell in love with the culture and the language. She just had a way of making the classes extremely fun by incorporating cultural lessons like learning about origami or wrapping packages.

Personal Growth: I became more comfortable with who I am, especially this year. Before, I never really gave it thought or cared or ever thought it mattered, but now I'm proud of the things that make me unique.

Lessons Learned: Don't be afraid to stand up for something you believe in, and don't let the harsh words of others keep you from standing up.

IWU Inspires: I've seen so many students do amazing things at this school. I'm also inspired by my friends; we call ourselves "The Tree." I've been through a lot these past four years and they've been so supportive through all of it. They made me a huge poster just to wish me luck on my next CPA exam!

Dear First-Years: Don't be afraid to get involved and definitely don't be afraid to be yourself. You have a lot of time here and you have so many options. And don't think you need everything planned out from the beginning. I thought I had all four years planned out; it was the surprises that made everything worth it.

Becky Jozefiak

sociology major, Lemont, Ill.
National Society of Leadership and Success, Best Buddies

Up Next: I will be working full-time as a Human Resources Coordinator at Sikich LLP in Naperville, Ill. I stayed in very close contact with my supervisor from one of my HR internships in Chicago, and when she transferred to Sikich, she asked me in for an interview over winter break.

Favorite Class: "The Profession of Social Work" because [Adjunct Faculty] Loree Adams not only taught through sharing many of her stories about her personal and work life, but was able to create a very open and comfortable environment for students to talk about their personal stories and share very personal points of views on various sensitive topics. She also incorporated fieldwork into the course, which I thought was great!

Most-loved SAGA Meal: Sunday BRUNCH!

Unique Moments: Spending as much free time as possible out on The Hot Spot freshman year.



Liezl Jacobson



Becky Jozefiak

IWU Inspires: The overwhelming willingness to help that most professors and faculty possess. Any time I needed advice, especially career advice, I knew there would be several people on campus I could talk to. That is something not every college student could say, and that is inspiring. I felt inspired to work hard to achieve my goals and be as good of a person as many of the people around me were day in and day out.

Amanda King

environmental studies major, Peoria, Ill.
Alpha Gamma Delta sorority, IWU Peace Garden, Weir Fellow

Up Next: I will serve as an Environmental Action Volunteer with the Peace Corps, stationed in Benin, Africa, for the next two years. I went to a talk about the Peace Corps my sophomore year, and I remember walking out of the auditorium knowing it was what I was meant to do after school. Now I get to do it!

Best Advice: Take classes that you would not normally take. Either if it's for general education or for pure enjoyment, take classes you want to take. Learn from your mistakes and grow from them. Also, make sure you work to create a lasting legacy with whatever activities you are involved in, and make sure you leave Illinois Wesleyan better than when you started.

Unexpected Opportunities: I honestly never expected to do Alternative Spring Break during my time at Wesleyan. My trip to Rosebud Reservation [in South Dakota] was by far one of the most life-changing experiences I have had.

IWU Inspires: The friendly and welcoming Wesleyan community has always been a place I can call home. I'm lucky to have met great people who I'll keep in contact with for years to come. I'm most inspired by the dedicated faculty that inspires and encourages students to reach their fullest potential. I would not have made the most out of my four years had it not been for the inspiring faculty and staff of this institution.

Leo Martinez

business administration major with a concentration in management, Chicago
Men's track and field and cross country teams, SALSA, Weir Fellow

Up Next: I will be starting a job at Progressive Insurance in Colorado Springs as a Systems Engineer in the IT department. I first met a Progressive recruiter at an internship fair. After a few rounds of interviews I was offered a summer internship. Progressive then offered jobs to the interns based on their performance throughout the summer.

Favorite Classes: "Introduction to Religious Thought" with [Associate] Professor of Religion Robert Erlewine. I've never seen a professor so passionate and intense, especially at 8 a.m. The other is "Seminar in Management/Trial Class" with [Telling] Professor of Business Administration Rob Kearney. We pick a real-life case that has been filed in court but not yet decided. We break into groups representing the plaintiffs and defendants, take the whole semester to go through the motions a lawyer would, and present the case in court in front of a real judge at the end of the semester.



Amanda King



Leo Martinez in front of the mural he created.

The Unexpected: I never expected myself to be working with the Action Research Center (ARC) so much during my senior year. I took the fall seminar with [ARC Director] Deborah Halperin and was able to create a mural on the west side of Bloomington. My second semester I got to do an internship with the Action Research Center under the guidance of Professor Halperin and [Adjunct Instructor] Carrie Mack where we analyzed nonprofit organizations, identified their weaknesses and put together a seminar/boot camp to help strengthen their weaknesses.

Greatest Takeaway: “Cherish the opportunity to compete.” Coach Shoe [Track Coach Chris Schumacher] always tells us this, but it’s definitely something that can be applied to everything from classes, to projects, to careers. When you have an opportunity, prepare for it and take full advantage of it, but most importantly, enjoy it.

Tim Reardanz

business administration major with finance concentration, Champaign, Ill.
National Residence Hall Honorary, Residence Hall Association, Student Senate

Up Next: I will be attending Bowling Green State University (in Ohio) pursuing a degree in College Student Personnel. My supervisors in the Office of Residential Life spurred my interest in student affairs, which ultimately led to BGSU.

Most-loved SAGA Meal: Chicken Nugget day or Mac & Cheese bar...
It's too hard to choose.

Soft Spot for Gulick: I never expected to love living in Gulick Hall. I've lived here for three out of my four years on campus, so now it's like my home away from home.

Memorable Moments: My most memorable moments on campus have to be all the late nights I have had with my best friend Molly Willeford '16, whether it would be going to the events in the Hansen Student Center or just staying up late watching movies and eating ice cream. All I have to say is there has been a lot of laughter.

Dear First-Years: Get to know as many people as you can! Also, do not try to rush through things. The four years here FLY by!



Tim Reardanz (far right) with Molly Willeford '16, President Dick Wilson, Vice President and Dean of Students Karla Carney-Hall

Adam Seifert

business administration major, Normal, Ill.
Baseball team

Up Next: I will start my career at State Farm Insurance as an underwriter for the Life Insurance company. Growing up in town and wanting to get into the insurance business, State Farm was always a place where I really wanted to work.

Memorable Moments: Last year's baseball double-header against Augustana. Having all those people at the game down the third base line is the best atmosphere in the CCIW. It was the most fun I've ever had playing baseball.

Loving Working So Hard: My major classes really got me excited and ready for a career in the business world.

Saying Goodbye: I'll miss the relationships that I have made over the four years. While I know that they will last much longer than the four years I spent here, I will miss the ability to walk down the hall or across the street to see close friends every day.



Adam Seifert

Lexia Swope

sociology and psychology double major, Springfield, Ill.
Weir Fellow, Circle K International, women's track and field team

Up Next: The social work graduate program at the University of Illinois. Social work is known as the marriage between psychology and sociology, so I feel it's perfect for me because I love both of those. Learning that I love to serve others, I realized that this is the field for me.

Memorable Experiences: I took the Action Research Seminar and it just really opened my eyes to how important serving the community is to me. We had to create a project and I chose to work with the Boys & Girls Club and create my own program there. And I never would have been able to do that if it wasn't for Illinois Wesleyan.

The Unexpected: I never expected to quit track. I was recruited [to run for Illinois Wesleyan]. My identity was as an athlete. But this year, I just didn't have time. I have to work two jobs, and priorities came up. It was a really hard decision for me to make, but I ended up loving it. I love that I have time to focus on school and work and just really experience my time here. I appreciate my time while I was an athlete, and while it was sad for me to leave, I never expected to love that I left.

Welcoming Change: You really learn about who you are when you're immersed in college and away from the life where you grew up. I learned that it's okay and necessary to step out of your comfort zone and to really just embrace who you are.

Inspiring IWU: The fact that they really want us to pursue our passions, and to figure it out in whatever way that is. For me, I've really learned about what I wanted to do by working with the community, and I was encouraged and helped in so many other ways. There are just so many things I wouldn't have done if it weren't for the small family environment here of everyone who just wants the best for you.



Lexia Swope

Kathryn (Kasia) Tomaszynska

anthropology major, Highwood, Ill.
Women's cross country team, Korean Culture Club, International Society

Up Next: Assistant Language Teacher for the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. I knew about the JET program ever since high school and was determined to apply my senior year of college. My long dream has been to go to Japan.

Greatest Takeaway: Making connections outside the classroom with the knowledge you learn inside the classroom.

Memorable Moments: Performing at I-Carnival and the Drag Ball. Also, founding Korean Culture Club (K-Pop Club) with my friend.

Favorite Professor: Professor [of Anthropology] Chuck Springwood. He is such a funny, kind, wise, and down-to-earth person and has guided me successfully throughout these four years.

Personal Transformation: I never expected to become such an outgoing person. I was a shy and quiet girl as a child.



Kathryn (Kasia) Tomaszynska

Tessy Ward

English-writing major, Oak Lawn, Ill.
Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority, Student Ambassador/Tour Guide, Titan Leadership Program

Up Next: Illinois State University for a Master of Art in English with a focus on Creative Writing and Poetry. I received a Sutherland Assistantship for poetry, allowing me to work in the publishing house my first year and teach in my second year.

Favorite Professor: I met [Associate] Professor of English Mike Theune in “Introduction to Creative Writing,” and soon was seeking to take every class he taught. He not only loves creative writing and literature, but his passion and energy make everyone in his presence love it, too. He can make a tiny phrase feel like a world of difference. Anyone who has been his student has heard, “WOW! Did you guys hear that???” I mean, COME ON!” Aside from the classroom, Professor Theune is incredibly invested in his students’ success. He offers to revise and edit tirelessly, and will happily meet with any student at the Bloomington Coffee Hound to go over crossed-out and destroyed portfolios. He has truly made me feel as if my work will be successful, and has always been a wonderful role model and mentor.

Love, hate and Texas: I never expected to love poetry so much. It wasn’t really my area of writing until college. I never expected to hate attending a large school [while studying abroad]. I disliked being one student of so many. I never expected to travel to Laredo, Texas, but I did for an Alternative Spring Break trip.

Inspiring IWU: The people who stay on campus as faculty and staff really inspire me. They dedicate so much time and energy to help students who will leave in a short period of time. It is amazing to watch a faculty or staff member reach out to me, even if my interaction with them will be brief.



Tessy Ward

Natalie Witter

economics major, Geneseo, Ill.
Mortar Board, *Park Place Economist* research journal editor, Kappa Delta sorority

Up Next: I will be attending law school at Michigan State University College of Law. Since freshman year I knew I wanted to go to law school. I was accepted to nine law schools. I am equally excited and terrified to begin my next chapter.

Saying Goodbye: I will mostly miss walking across the quad or through State Farm Hall and running into a friend or faculty member and chatting with them. I have grown close to so many people at IWU, and not getting to see those people regularly will be something I greatly miss.

Caring Campus: Looking back at what I was expecting out of college as a freshman, I never expected to grow so much, both personally and academically, and I never expected to love the IWU community as much as I have come to. I come from a small town, and I was certain that I wouldn’t find people that would care about my personal well-being as much as the people that I have grown up with. However, I could not have been more wrong. I have gained a support system on campus that includes friends, faculty, and my sorority sisters.



Natalie Witter

Just Do It: I advise one to not set limits for oneself. Don't ever tell yourself that you cannot do something or you're too tired to do something. Just do it. You will either fail or succeed, and whichever happens, you'll learn from it and be a better person. There is no better time in your life to try something and follow your passion.

Blair Wright

psychology major, Sandwich, Ill.

Student Senate, Youth Engaged in Philanthropy, Action Research Center

Up Next: I will be attending medical school at the University of Illinois. I'll be in the Rural Medicine program, which will give me the opportunity to develop my community and leadership skills as I continue down the path toward becoming a physician. I came into college wanting to go to medical school, and I worked hard to make my college experience as meaningful as possible.

Favorite Classes: It's so hard to pick just one! I loved "American Social Policy" with Professor of Political Science Greg Shaw because he really challenged students to explore our own beliefs and engage in respectful but critical discussions about important issues. I also loved my Gateway class with [Adjunct Faculty] Holly Hughey because this was my first classroom experience at IWU, and Professor Hughey could not have done a better job at making me feel at home here and preparing me for the next four years.

Saying Goodbye: There is nothing I won't miss about IWU. I will be especially sad to leave the community of people I have grown so close to...my friends, faculty and staff who have helped me grow, the Action Research Center and the community experiences I have had because of it, and the entire IWU community that deserves all my gratitude for making the last four years so amazing for me.

Fun in Funsell: I will never forget the moments that took place in the Funsell 2 [Munsell Hall and Ferguson Hall] lounge freshman year. This is where I met some of my lifelong friends. This is where I watched *Baggage* for the first time, mastered bird mating calls, peeled cheese out of my general biology book, danced alongside a broken Halloween toy, played [the board game] Settlers of Catan and so much more.

From Avoidance to Inspiration: I was over-involved in high school, so I came into college assuring myself I would not do student government. That did not last long (not even a week), but I'm incredibly glad that I got involved with Student Senate. I am so proud to be at an institution that truly values students and encourages student growth by welcoming us to participate in important university-wide discussions.



Blair Wright

Compiled by Tia Patsavas '16