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Graduating Seniors Ready to Tackle What's Next

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Graduating Seniors Ready to Tackle What's Next

April 22, 2016

In honor of the entire Class of 2016, we asked a sample of graduating seniors about their four years at Illinois Wesleyan – their favorite professors, their memorable moments, their advice for first-year students, and their most important takeaways from their college experience. We learned a great deal about what it means to be a Titan, from finals week all-nighters in the Pfeiffer lounge to the beloved mac 'n cheese bar at SAGA. Read on to learn what they'll miss most about Illinois Wesleyan and how they'll bring their passions to what the future holds for them after graduation.



Benjamin Bouie
Major: Accounting

What's Next: Tax associate at RSM in downtown Chicago



Tina Fleres
Major: Biology

What's Next: Medical school at the University of Texas Health Science Center School of Medicine in San Antonio



Adam Garcia
Major: Risk Management

Up Next: IT analyst at State Farm



Mike Hennel
Majors: Economics and financial services

What's Next: Investment management analyst, Goldman Sachs, New York City



Jazmyne Kellogg
Major: Sociology

Up Next: Admissions counselor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Chicago satellite office



Cameron Leberecht
Major: International business

Up Next: Post-baccalaureate writing intern with brand and marketing firm VSA Partners, Chicago



Max Leonard

Majors: Economics and physics

What's Next: Analyst at Cornerstone Research, an economic and financial consulting firm, in their Washington, D.C. office



Chaunta Love

Major: Psychology

What's Next: Residential treatment specialist, The Baby Fold, Normal, Ill.



Gindy Nguyen

Majors: Accounting and economics

Up Next: Tax associate at PwC in Chicago



Christine Peterson

Majors: Mathematics and Hispanic Studies

What's Next: Actuarial Analyst at Allstate in Northbrook, Ill.



Julia Savich

Major: Physics

Up Next: Master's program in Engineering Design Innovation at Northwestern University



Tyler Stacey

Majors: Theatre Arts and Economics

Up Next: Production management intern at McCarter Theatre Company, Princeton, New Jersey



Nina Waszak

Major: Environmental Studies-ecology

What's Next: Sustainable agriculture volunteer with the Peace Corps in Panama



Inez White

Major: Sociology

What's Next: Graduate school for a Master of Science in Nursing at Millikin University



Megan Win

Majors: Music (voice) and psychology

Up Next: Master's program for occupational therapy at University of Illinois at Chicago



Satin Young

Major: Sociology

What's Next: City Year AmeriCorps member working in Washington, D.C.



Ruomeng Zhang

Major: Chemical physics

Up Next: Ph.D. program in chemistry, Princeton University

(Responses edited for length.)

Benjamin Bouie

Accounting major from Robbins, Ill.

Varsity football

Up Next: Tax associate at [audit, tax and consulting firm] RSM in downtown Chicago. I found the job through Titan CareerLink. At the conclusion of the interview, they told all applicants we'd be informed of hiring decisions within the next two weeks, but to my surprise they contacted me within the next two hours and offered me the position. I was so excited I instantly called my mother to tell her the good news. It's not good to talk on the phone and drive, but I had to.

Favorite Professor: Professor of Sociology and Anthropology Georgette Rundblad a.k.a. "George" because she is so down to earth and has a cheerful personality.

Why IWU: I chose IWU because I could get a good education from a great school and play the sport that I love – football.

Memorable Moment: After we won the Simpson game, Coach [Norm] Eash attempted to do the Nae Nae dance.



Benjamin Bouie

Tina Fleres

Biology major from Mundelein, Ill.

Best Buddies, Alpha Phi Omega, Unite for Sight, Tri-Beta biology honorary, DRL, General Chemistry teaching assistant, piano accompanist for the School of Music

Up Next: Medical school at the University of Texas Health Science Center School of Medicine (UTHSCSA) in San Antonio. I was accepted to two medical schools. UTHSCSA seems to prioritize the well being of its students and it's considerably more affordable than my other option.

Funsell, Sardines and the Hot Spot: Some of my most memorable moments involve hanging out and meeting friends in the Ferguson-Munsell fourth floor lounge. I remember one night in particular where we played sardines on the Quad and stayed up all night talking on the Hot Spot.

Favorite Professor: I met Dr. James House (chemistry) my first semester and at first I was scared of him. However, as I got to know him, I found that he's a hilarious and talkative guy who genuinely cares about his students. I can go into his office at any time to talk about anything! He is one professor I will stay in touch with after I graduate.

Dear First-Years: Don't give up. I almost quit pre-med after my freshman year because I thought I wouldn't be able to get through it. I'm so glad I stayed on track and didn't quit so easily. At the same time, changing your major isn't a setback or a failure. Find something that will truly make you happy in the long run.



Tina Fleres

Adam Garcia

Risk management major from Darien, Ill.

Men's soccer team, rugby, Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity

Up Next: IT analyst at State Farm. I was part of the Community Partner Program (CPP) summer internship where I interned three days at State Farm and two days at a nonprofit. I continued to work part time for State Farm and was offered the full-time position in August.

Most-loved SAGA meal: I would pick the mac 'n cheese bar. *(Editor's note: The majority of the seniors surveyed picked the mac 'n cheese bar as their favorite, too.)*

Getting Mauled: I never expected to play rugby because it always looked painful. But we [the rugby football club] went to the playoffs in our first season and I loved every minute of it.

Inspiring IWU: Illinois Wesleyan offers a lot of opportunities to grow as an individual, and these opportunities inspired me to explore different passions.



Adam Garcia

Mike Hennel

Economics and financial services double major from Elmhurst, Ill.

Co-founder and president IWU Investment Club, National Society of Leadership and Success, chairman of Student Advisory Board, Alpha Lambda Delta, Pembroke Visiting Student Programme at the University of Oxford

Up Next: Investment management analyst, Goldman Sachs (GS), New York. I interned at GS in summer 2014. At a previous internship at Hillshire Brands in Chicago, I'd met some GS analysts. I applied to GS and was invited to interview during one of the Super Days.

Memorable Moment: When [International Office Director] Stacey Shimizu told me I was accepted into Oxford University. Seeing all the hard work I put into my academic career leading up to that moment had finally paid off -- that was something I will never forget.

Favorite Professor: All of them have had a profound impact. Changing majors as well as a year abroad have characterized my college career. The amount of support I received from the faculty speaks volumes as to how IWU professors are willing to help both from an academic as well as a personal perspective.

Dear First-Years and Rising Seniors: Whether it be your first year or last, make the best of it. It is so easy to be complacent when you are entering or leaving college, and this is what holds a lot of people back. Be ambitious. I never thought I would attend Oxford University or be working on Wall Street, but I worked consistently and it has paid off.



Mike Hennel

Jazmyne Kellogg

Sociology major from Homewood, Ill.

Co-founder, Council for Inclusion and Awareness; Student Senate; Black Student Union, president; Lead Multicultural Educator; Senior Class President; First-Year Resident Advisor, Gulick Hall; Titan Leadership Program

Up Next: Admissions counselor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Chicago satellite office. I have a passion for education and social justice, and this job aligns both of my passions as I will be able to help recruit marginalized students.

Favorite Professor: I don't have just one. Those who have become my favorites have gone above and beyond to ensure I am doing my best both in and outside of the classroom. They have given me hugs when I needed them, laughed at my jokes, and tutored me. I am grateful for and love the following more than I think they know: Dr. Narendra Jaggi (physics) and Dr. Meghan Burke (sociology).



Jazmyne Kellogg

Choosing IWU: I enjoyed my campus visits and the friendly vibe I received. A huge selling point for me was the vast number of study abroad programs and the ability to transfer all financial aid.

Dear First-Years: Get involved! Study abroad. Don't worry too much. Everything will work out the way it is supposed to. Study abroad! Get outside your comfort zone and meet people from different racial, ethnic, gender, sexual and religious backgrounds than your own. Take May Term. Oh, and did I mention study abroad? It is the best decision I ever made as a student!

Missing You: I'll miss the people I have met – my friends who have wiped my tears, kept me up-to-date with popular terms, and had random dance sessions. I will also dearly miss Dean of Students Karla Carney-Hall, [Director of Student Activities] Colin Stewart, [Office of Diversity and Inclusion Director] Brandon Common, Dr. Burke, Dr. Jaggi, and [Residential Life Area Director] Aaron White. They have all had a huge impact on my personal, professional, and academic development.

Cameron Leberecht

International business major from Elgin, Ill.

German Club, Delta Phi Alpha German honor society

Up Next: Post-baccalaureate writing intern with brand and marketing firm VSA Partners, Chicago. Junior year, I decided I wanted to write for a living. I didn't have the major for it, I didn't have the resume for it, so I took a leap of faith with a small portfolio of work. Luckily, the people at VSA were willing to take the same chance.

Favorite Professor(s): I couldn't narrow it to one, so I have to give three: Adam Woodis (German), Mike Weis (History), and Mike Young (History). These three encouraged my interests, pushed me to expand my academic horizons, and ALWAYS made time for me. For that, I cannot thank them enough, especially to Professor Young, who graciously allowed me to write my History 290 paper on sports. If you know Dr. Young, you know just how much that means.

IWU Inspires: IWU is home to a community of people who are here to do so much more than earn a degree and move on. Wesleyan students go above and beyond what is necessary in order to pursue their passions, involving themselves in just about everything they can. Their enthusiasm is contagious; their work ethic impressive. I may not understand someone else's passion for splice diagram singularities, but I definitely admire it.

Unforgettable Conspiracy Theories: Hosting the German Undergraduate Research Conference is always fun, and usually brings a character or two into town. We've heard presentations on Kafka, the refugee crisis, and even an...interesting presentation covering the alleged conspiracies perpetrated by American presidential families – all in German. That one was a bit out there, but definitely made for an unforgettable moment.

Greatest Takeaway: It's the people. Great professors can transform a boring subject into a fascinating one. Invested students can turn a struggling organization into a campus powerhouse. Hard-working staff make sure you have everything you need. It didn't take long to realize that IWU is more than a campus, a course catalog, and a ticket to a high-paying job. It's a community, built on the backs of the people who live and work here. Twenty years down the road, it's the people that I'll remember most.

Max Leonard

Economics and physics double major from Glenview, Ill.

Men's track and field team, associate editor of the *Undergraduate Economic Review*

Up Next: Analyst at Cornerstone Research, an economic and financial consulting firm providing analysis and expert testimony in all phases of commercial litigation and regulatory proceedings, in the company's Washington, D.C. office. I'd heard about economic consulting from a member of the Class of 2015 and I thought it would be a great fit for my background. I reached out to the Career Center to see how they could help me in pursuing this path. [Career Center Director] Warren Kistner connected me with a number of alums, a few of whom were able to forward my resume to the right people.



Max Leonard

Favorite Professor: Dr. Narendra Jaggi has been my advisor since day one and my professor twice. He made me realize that just because you are a physicist, economist, doctor, engineer, teacher or whatever else, that doesn't mean your profession is the only thing you can be knowledgeable about or interested in. Realizing this took away a lot of pressure when I was looking for jobs or trying to commit to a job or graduate school.

Surprise Guest for Lunch: I never expected to have lunch with [now President Emeritus] Wilson at Tommy's my freshman year. That opened my eyes to how much everyone is respected here. President Wilson was legitimately interested in what my roommate and I thought of the school and what we thought should be improved. I respected the time he took out of his busy day to talk to two freshmen.

Working Hard Makes Good Times Great: My most important takeaway from IWU will be that the more effort you put into something, the more you get out of it. Looking back on my time at IWU, some of my fondest memories are of the times when the students in my classes were all together, struggling late at night, whether it be studying for a test or making a hover board. I don't remember any of the times I spent watching Netflix.

Chaunta Love

Psychology major from Danville, Ill.

IWU Autism Social Support Group, PATH volunteer, Stepping Stones volunteer

Up Next: Residential treatment specialist, The Baby Fold, a multi-service, nonprofit in Normal, Ill., serving children and families. The position will give me experience with troubled youth and the work will make an impact on the community. I wanted to gain experience before applying to grad school. I just had a baby in March and want to take time off from school to be with her.

Choosing IWU: I truly felt at home on campus and the faculty, staff and students were amazing and welcoming when I came to campus, not to mention the amazing student-teacher ratio and four-year graduation rate.

Favorite Professors: A tie between William Jaeckle (biology) and Brad Sheese (psychology). They are both amazing professors who pushed me to give my all in their courses and believed in my success and in me.

Greatest Takeaway: Even if you are not a social butterfly, you would be surprised at the impact you make on individuals. It's also OK to ask for help.



Chaunta Love

Gindy Nguyen

Accounting and economics double major from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Amnesty International, Student Senate Financial Advisory Board member and representative

Up Next: Tax associate, PwC in Chicago. I did an unpaid internship for a start-up medical services company in Arizona and gained valuable experience there. Then I sat through as many practice interviews as possible at the Career Center before my real interview with PwC. I also received a lot of professional help from the Career Center and from a close friend, who is an IWU alum working for PwC.

Choosing IWU: I learned about IWU through a friend who also applied and came to IWU with me. One of my main considerations was that IWU had very strong accounting and risk management programs, which I was interested in at that time. I wanted to start my education at a small school because I thought a small, close-knit community would make my transition to college easier as an international student.

Memorable Moment: My first semester of junior year, I had four cumulative finals in two days. To make myself stay awake, I temporarily moved from my precious room in Magill to Pfeiffer's second floor lounge and lived there with my friends for three days and nights. I have never been a morning person, but during that period, I went to SAGA for breakfast two days in a row at 7 a.m. after staying awake for two whole nights. I felt great to be the first one in SAGA in the morning!

What I Like About Me: I never expected to become the person I am today. During the past four years, I struggled a lot in identifying and accepting myself. Before, I had relatively low self-esteem and always wondered why I could not be as good as other people. I became more confident and learned to accept that I am enough. Of course, I still have doubtful moments, but now, I often feel more at ease doing what I like, rather than punishing myself for not doing what others like.



Gindy Nguyen

Christine Peterson

Mathematics and Hispanic Studies double major from Bloomington, Ill.

Women's track and field and cross country teams, Sigma Kappa sorority, Association for Women in Mathematics, IWU Actuarial Society, Lunch Buddies

Up Next: Actuarial analyst at Allstate, Northbrook, Ill. I had an incredible actuarial internship at State Farm last summer, but I decided it was time to pursue a job outside of Bloomington because I've lived here my entire life.

Choosing IWU: I chose IWU because I loved the emphasis on well-rounded students. I wanted to experience everything – the academics, studying abroad, college athletics, Greek life – and that's not possible at every institution.

Favorite Professor: [Chair and Professor of Hispanic Studies] Christina Isabelli! She was my Gateway teacher, she's been my advisor since year one, and my IWU experience wouldn't have been the same without her encouragement to try new things and take classes just because they interested me. She also taught my favorite class, "History of the Spanish Language." The linguistics aspect of the class combined formal systems and deductive reasoning with languages, which is the closest combination I'd seen of my two majors in one class. It was fascinating.

Source of Inspiration: The professors at IWU inspire me constantly, particularly my math professors and Hispanic Studies professors. Even with their own research and academic commitments, they devote so much time and energy into their students' success.

Dear First-Years: Welcome to the greatest place on earth. Really make the most of your time here.



Christine Peterson

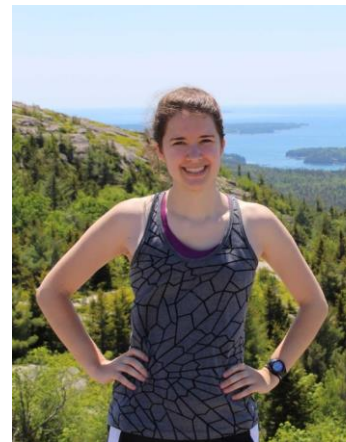
Julia Savich

Physics major from Palatine, Ill.

Habit for Humanity, the Society of Physics Students, SPIE, Rock Climbing Club

Up Next: Master's program in Engineering Design Innovation (EDI), Northwestern University. I interned last summer on an REU research internship involving forest bioproducts research at the University of Maine-Orono. That experience, along with talking with people from all different backgrounds and jumping into any opportunity that came my way, led me to finding EDI. It's what I have been describing as my dream job for years.

Choosing IWU: I was looking for a small school that would provide me with one-on-one interaction with professors and a variety of opportunities to get involved in. When I visited IWU, the physics professors all came to talk with prospective students and conveyed genuine interest in their students. IWU was the perfect place because it promised a strong, supportive community.



Julia Savich

Memory at Mugsy's: A unique moment was "Quantum Physics" class last semester when Professor Jaggi took us to Mugsy's (a burger place across the street from campus) for class. I learned more that day than all the others because we had to really think about what we were writing down in our notebooks as he taught us. Class ran over an extra hour because we were all so focused.

Saying Goodbye: I will miss the ability to walk across campus and to work with students and professors from all different backgrounds. IWU's small size encourages students to branch out to others outside of their majors. Meeting people with different educational interests has sparked my own interest in various subjects, and working with others from non-physics backgrounds affirmed the value of collaboration. I have worked with art, biology, history, and environmental studies professors on non-class related projects, all of whom were willing to take time out of their busy days to meet with me one-on-one and develop a cross-disciplinary idea. IWU is a wonderfully collaborative place, and I will surely miss it.

Tyler Stacey

Theatre Arts and economics double major from St. Charles, Ill.

Quickies sketch comedy group, Sigma Pi fraternity, Best Buddies

Up Next: Production management intern at McCarter Theatre Company, Princeton, New Jersey. I applied at the recommendation of [Associate Professor of Theatre Arts] Dani Snyder-Young. She's also my favorite professor for helping me recognize theatre as an art.

Choosing IWU: I choose IWU because of the flexibility to double major at a reasonably sized school.

Making It Your Own, but Not Alone: What's most inspiring about IWU is the ability to carve your own path and create your own education. My most important takeaway, however, is that making connections is absolutely everything.

Best Thing about Bloomington-Normal: Is D.P. Dough an acceptable answer?



Tyler Stacey

Nina Waszak

Environmental Studies-Ecology major from Riverside, Ill.

Women's tennis team, Peace Garden assistant manager

Up Next: Sustainable agriculture volunteer with the Peace Corps in Panama. I have wanted to join the Peace Corps since high school. Truthfully, I'm surprised I made this happen.

Favorite Class: "Russian Women in Literature and Cinema" with [Isaac Funk] Professor Marina Balina. Nearly everything I learned about Russian culture and society totally surprised me, specifically, how Russia has viewed women throughout its history and how these views are visible in Russian film and literature.

Love at First Sight: I'd never visited IWU before I came here [as a first-year] student. Wesleyan gave me the best financial aid package of all the schools where I applied. I can't imagine having gone anywhere else!



Nina Waszak

Bloomington-Normal Favorite: The restaurant where I work, Epiphany Farms. Their farm-to-fork business model is truly heartening. Everyone from the chefs to the servers works on the farm, so we get to see the entire cycle of food. I even got to work with [the restaurant's] owners to conduct my senior seminar research.

Inez White

Sociology major from Chicago

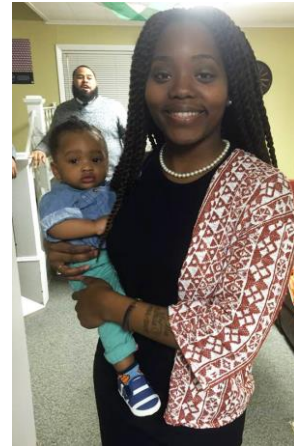
Black Student Union (two-term treasurer), Student Senate (Inclusion and Awareness Committee member for two terms), Partners in Health (secretary), Pride Alliance, Here At IWU (coordinator for two terms)

Up Next: Graduate school to obtain a Master of Science in Nursing at Millikin University.

Choosing IWU: It was a small campus that fostered student participation and research. This was ideal because I like to be heard, involved, and encouraged to participate in the classroom. Also, I was originally planning to become a physician, and IWU had great medical school acceptance rates.

Unexpected Field of Study: I never expected to love sociology and before coming here, I did not know what [the field of sociology] was.

Memorable Moments: Making the Dean's List spring semester of my junior year while I was seven months pregnant. And, hosting and coordinating the second annual Here at IWU during my sophomore year.



Inez White

Megan Win

Music (voice) and psychology double major from Frankfort, Ill.

Kappa Delta sorority, Collegiate Choir president, IWU Happy Club president, Delta Omicron, Unlicensed Syncopation, JM7* Improv Troupe pianist, Illinois Wesleyan Consort

Up Next: Master's program for occupational therapy at the University of Illinois at Chicago. I will be taking the next three years to obtain a master's degree and doctorate in occupational therapy.

Choosing IWU: I chose IWU because I could easily pursue my passion for music and my interest in psychology. Since IWU is great in both areas, I knew I couldn't go wrong.

Favorite Professor: With so many incredible professors at IWU, it is difficult to pick just one. However, Dr. Scott Ferguson, director of the Collegiate Choir, brings so much passion, dedication and love to every choir rehearsal that is unparalleled. He cares so much about the music – and about us – that he is continuously striving for excellence and pushing us to be better musicians, even at the last performances [of a tour or year]. Not only does he teach us to be outstanding musicians, more importantly he teaches us to be outstanding people. I am most grateful for all of the life lessons he has taught us and the love that he shows us.

Inspiring IWU: I am constantly in awe of the accomplishments of my peers and how much passion they all have. Whether the passion is for academia, for being Multifaith Ambassadors, for poetry, for reviving ancient music, for saving the world through nursing, for giving back to the community, for being advocates for those whose voices aren't as loud, and for so many other things, I am humbled by the talent and intellect of my peers. I am forever grateful for the people that Illinois Wesleyan has put into my life.



Megan Win

Satin Young

Sociology major from Decatur, Ill.

Black Student Union (BSU) fundraising coordinator, Council of Inclusion and Awareness (CIA) chairperson, South Asian Student Association (SASA) Student Senate representative, PRISM

Up Next: City Year AmeriCorps member working in Washington, D.C. starting in July. At City Year, I must be able to identify students who are at risk of dropping out and provide them with necessary support. I was introduced to the program by the Career Center one week before applications were due. I was dead set on taking a gap year, moving out of state, and helping people with my degree, so the program was perfect for me.

Favorite Class: In “History of Social Thought,” I learned to combine past lessons with developed sociological theories in order to critically analyze our current society. Hard to believe, but sociohistorical research is now one of my favorite things to do.

Leading the Pack: I always attended campus events that interested me, but I did not take on any leadership roles until my junior year. Now that I have held executive decisions with BSU, SASA and PRISM, I regret not doing so sooner.

Greatest Takeaway: Illinois Wesleyan has taught me to be open-minded. You never know what you’ll gain from trying or learning something new. I never expected to grow this much as a person. I feel completely different from the woman I was four years ago. I must say that I love the new me.



Satin Young

Ruomeng Zhang

Chemical physics major from Zhangshu, Jiangxi Province, China

Founder of Cross-Cultural Connections registered student organization, Lunar New Year performer

Up Next: Princeton University, Ph.D. program in chemistry. Last year I was a summer visiting research student at Princeton. I had a taste of what research would be like in graduate school.

Artes Liberales : I enjoyed most of the classes that I took at IWU. I think the arts and the sciences complement each other well and therefore they are inseparable. I like to seek the connections between different subjects, so it is hard to name one class as my favorite.

Bridging Gaps: As an international student, sometimes I found it difficult to communicate with American students because of the language barrier. At the same time, I noticed that some native students were a little afraid to talk to international students because they were not sure about international students’ English level. I decided to establish a club [Cross-Cultural Connections] which aims to bridge the gap between domestic students and international students. Last year we had a Halloween Party, which turned out to be a big success.

Greatest Takeaway: Because of my family’s financial situation, I had to graduate an entire year early. When I first started college, I was very anxious about my future and always worried whether I could communicate well with others because English is not my first language. I had a lot of struggles in the first two years at IWU. However, I gradually learned to let things go and focus more on the present instead of being bothered by terrible experiences in the past. I have learned to enjoy the process rather than paying too much attention to the results.



Ruomeng Zhang