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Faith In Diversity: Kyle Schnitzenbaumer



Kyle Schnitzenbaumer sees no conflicts between his strong religious faith and his ability to thrive in a liberal arts setting such as Illinois Wesleyan.

“The campus is accepting because it’s diverse,” he says, citing the many backgrounds, beliefs, and lifestyles of his fellow students. “There are a lot of diverse thought processes at Illinois Wesleyan,” he says. “I was exposed to a lot of different things coming in just from being exposed to others.”

Schnitzenbaumer played guitar in the worship band and also helped start the IWU chapter of a national Christian service fraternity. (Marc Featherly)

the worship band, Schnitzenbaumer is also a founding member of Illinois Wesleyan’s chapter of Sigma Theta Epsilon. He and a group of 12 male students started the IWU chapter of the national Christian service fraternity during Schnitzenbaumer’s sophomore year. “We wanted a group of Christian men that were really close,” he explains.

Active in the faith organization DRL (Death, Resurrection, Life), where he plays guitar in

Schnitzenbaumer — who attended a private, all-boys Catholic high school — says he didn’t know what to expect from college, since he has no older siblings. “But it was a really good transition,” he says. “For me it just seemed natural. I made friends right away.

One of those friends is fellow senior Tim Van Dorn, who met Schnitzenbaumer as a floormate in Ferguson Hall during their first year. “We both contest it was likely the greatest freshman guys’ floor in IWU history,” Van Dorn says. “The countless stories and situations we have shared through living, eating, and sharing life together are the memories that will bring us back to our college years whenever we reunite in the future.”

Such friendships helped make Schnitzenbaumer’s experience at Illinois Wesleyan a positive one. “I’m most satisfied with the people I’ve met and the friends I’ve made — including my relationships with professors and staff here,” he says. “The people I know at IWU are the people I’m closest with now.”

Schnitzenbaumer is a chemistry major and began working in the department’s stockroom as a first-year student, giving him the chance to socialize with professors on a daily basis. He deeply admires the faculty’s dedication to their students. “You can see in their teaching style that they know what they’re doing and that they’re pushing students for the students’ benefit,” he says.

As vice president of IWU's student chapter of the American Chemical Society, Schnitzenbaumer directs the chemical demonstrations that are presented at each meeting. "Kyle has a knack of coming up with fun demos, often involving a multitude of colors, while keeping the audience enthralled and informed about the chemistry behind each demo," says Associate Chemistry Professor Ram Mohan. "It is his fun-loving attitude while maintaining academic rigor that impresses me."

In addition to his extracurricular activities and stockroom job, Schnitzenbaumer has also worked as a tutor and teaching assistant. He recalls his junior year as his most difficult academic challenge. "I had eight hours of lab a week, plus TA hours, 11 hours of work, and other classes," he says. But, he says, this challenging year is "also what academically has paid off the most."

His Illinois Wesleyan education has been successful, Schnitzenbaumer says, because he has "learned how to learn" instead of just memorizing facts. "I've learned how to experience things and appreciate opportunities." As for entering the real world, "I'm simultaneously really excited and scared to death to graduate."

Returning to a place like Illinois Wesleyan just might be his dream job. He is considering attending graduate school for a Ph.D. in education in order to teach undergraduates at a small, private university like IWU.

"I like the atmosphere of the small, liberal arts school," Schnitzenbaumer says. "It appeals to me."