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Moving Ahead and Looking Back

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Moving Ahead & Looking Back

This spring, we polled several graduating seniors about their IWU experience, from post-college plans to best memories and biggest sources of inspiration. Their answers, excerpted for this article, provide telling glimpses of these students' college journeys, just as the next chapter of their lives was about to begin.

Compiled by TIA PATSAVAS '16

Lexia Swope

Majors: Sociology and psychology

Hometown: Springfield, Ill.



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.

Taking action: 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 local 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. My identity was as an athlete. I appreciated my time while I was an athlete, and it was sad for me to leave, but this year I just didn't have time. I had 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 loved that I had time to focus on school and work and just really experienced my time here.

Embracing 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.

What's best about Illinois Wesleyan: 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.

Anh Tung (Andy) Dao

Majors: Economics and mathematics

Hometown: Hanoi, Vietnam



Up next: I'm excited to start a new life after college at Compass Lexecon in Washington, D.C., and to do the work that I like, which is economic consulting.

Second chance: I applied to the company in my junior year, but I wasn't accepted at first. The following year, I applied and was chosen for the Mark Israel Summer Research Fellowship in Economics at IWU [endowed by Mark Israel '91]. My research was on the relationship between trade openness and economic growth. I learned a tremendous amount about statistical analysis, determined manipulation,

and also how to present economic concepts to an audience that is not very knowledgeable about economics. I was able to leverage that experience to show my skill-set and what I have learned, so it really helped me a lot in my second interview with Compass Lexecon.

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.

International perspective: I made a lot of good friends here. People are so friendly compared to other places in America. I've been getting a lot of help and assistance from the International Office, from professors and also from my American friends. I have had very good, very intelligent professors, and I've learned a lot from them. I picked up a lot of skills that are transferable to the workplace.

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 secondhand 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 coworkers. So I went to college, took some introductory classes, and I loved it, and I've been loving it ever since.

Leo Martinez

Major: Business administration (management concentration)

Hometown: Chicago



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 courses: “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 the Trial Litigation course 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.

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 ARC under the guidance of Deborah Halperin and [ARC coordinator] Carrie Mack where we analyzed nonprofit organizations, identified their weaknesses and put together a seminar/boot camp to help strengthen those weaknesses.

Greatest takeaway: “Cherish the opportunity to compete.” Coach Shoe [Head Track and Field Coach Chris Schumacher] always told us this, but it’s 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.

Natalie Witter

Major: Economics

Hometown: Geneseo, Ill.



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.

Unforgettable: My most memorable moment is the dance party President Wilson started at the Senior Dinner. It was such a fun, unexpected moment.

Support system: 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. Coming from a small town, 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.

For new students: 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.

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.

Jordan Collins

Major: Psychology

Hometown: Springfield, Ill.



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.

IWU inspires: I am inspired by Illinois Wesleyan for its acceptance of every person from any walk of life. Individuals may come into IWU with closed minds, but leave with open hearts.

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.

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.

For new students: Value every second and opportunity that you can. Because once it’s gone, it’s gone.

Adam Seifert

Major: Business administration

Hometown: Normal, Ill.



Up next: I will start my career at State Farm 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.

Best memory : Last year's baseball doubleheader against Augustana at Horenberger Field. Having all those people at the game down the third-base line is the best atmosphere in the CCIW (College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin). It was the most fun I've ever had playing baseball.

Inspired by: My classmates. I was surrounded by people that worked hard and challenged me to do the same.

Ready and able: 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.

Theresa "Tessy" Ward

Major: English-writing (writing concentration)

Hometown: Oak Lawn, Ill.



Up next: Illinois State University for a master's in English with a focus on creative writing and poetry. I received a Sutherland fellowship for poetry, allowing me to work in the publishing house my first year and teach in my second year.

A world of difference: 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' successes. 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.

Likes and dislikes: 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.

Nathan Douglas

Majors: Hispanic studies and secondary education

Hometown: 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.

Most memorable: When I was able to leave class for a week to go to a conference in Barcelona.

Learning from failure: I never expected to fail a final exam. I got a 68 on Professor of History Mike Weis's "Imperial Spain" final while studying abroad [in IWU's Spain Program] 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 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.

Blair Wright

Major: Psychology

Hometown: Sandwich, Ill.



Up next: I will attend medical school at the University of Illinois, 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. This was my first classroom experience at IWU, and she 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, danced alongside a broken Halloween toy, played *Settlers of Catan* and so much more.

Change of heart : 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.

Amanda King

Major: Environmental studies

Hometown: Peoria, Ill.



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.

Alternative opportunity: 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. It was a close second to my study-abroad experience.

Inspired by : [Political Science] Professor Jim Simeone has endless amounts of care and devotion to the well-being of his students, fellow faculty and the Peace Garden. His hard work and dedication showed me what it's like to truly be passionate for a cause. He has always encouraged my prospective career path, and without his guidance at IWU, I would definitely not be going into a field I belong in.

Laurine Brown [associate professor of Health and Environmental Studies] always supports and cares for her students. No matter how bad of a day they are having, which we all have had quite a few, she always knows how to encourage and motivate them towards a better future.

A second home: 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.

Kasia Tomaszynska

Major: Anthropology

Hometown: Highwood, Ill.



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.

Biggest 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.

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

Liezl Jacobson

Major: Accounting

Hometown: Vernon Hills, Ill.



(Above) Liezl Jacobson (seated center) with her group of classmates and friends who dubbed themselves "The Tree."

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 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" (*shown right*). 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.

Tim Reardanz

Major: Business administration (finance concentration)

Hometown: Champaign, Ill.



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.

Special place : 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 a home away from home.

Best memories: All the late nights with my best friend Molly Willeford '16, whether it would be going to 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!