New Student Stories at Eastern Illinois University

Fall 2011 **University Foundations**

Eastern Illinois University

Feeling Homesick?

Worried about fitting in?

Wondering how to find friends?

Who will help you be successful?

Concerned about being on your own ?

FA11 Peer Leaders

Kate Brown
Caitlyn Buchanan
Alex Cler
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Samantha Fifer
Julie Huck
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Colleen Nelson
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Julie's Freshman Year

The idea of going away to college, leaving my family and the home I have lived in my whole life, was never a scary thought for me. I was independent and I was ready. I thrived on the idea of "freedom." Although my parents were fairly lax in regard to rules of the household, I still felt trapped and ready to be out on my own, making my own decisions. When the day came to actually move in, however, my nerves overtook me and I started to realize that my day of freedom was actually here. Little did I know that freedom came with many other components such as important responsibilities, confidence, willingness to learn, and excellent time management skills.

Surprisingly, however, the transition from home cooked meals, laundry on Sundays, and TiVo was easily adjustable. I felt incredibly confident in myself and overtook all the responsibilities my parents had always done for me. Although I missed HBO, having a living room, and a kitchen, I made do with what I had and made it work for me. Making friendships and conversing with other freshmen on my residence hall floor didn't come as a hard task either. I have always been incredibly social, so finding those to help conquer college with me was not a problem. Although my roommate was a friend from home, I felt it necessary to find other friends and reach outside of my comfort zone. I met many people on my floor in Carman and became very close with a girl named Emily. She was just as bubbly and outgoing as me, however, she beat me to my door to introduce herself on move in day. We became best friends and explored all that Eastern Illinois University had to offer by each other's side. Emily not only was a good social companion, but she also introduced me to the many departments on campus, including the Health Education Resource Center. Emily, being in the Gateway Program, took me to a Rubber Lovers presentation which very much peaked my interest. This presentation intrigued me so much that I decided I wanted to be more involved in this safe sex campaign that was going on at EIU. After contacting the H.E.R.C. and attending an interview, I officially started volunteering my time in the office writing articles, as well as attending and assisting with Rubber Lover presentations.

Having involved myself in such a huge department, I was able to broaden my networking base and really start becoming involved in the many activities on campus. Although I took the initiative myself, I still wish that I had a mentor to be there telling me how important it is to become involved. Other students aren't so lucky when it comes to finding opportunities to become involved with, mostly because they don't know where to look. It is incredibly important to get involved right from the start, and having someone there helping you makes a huge difference. For myself, volunteering at the H.E.R.C. has given me many other opportunities including the chance to be a part of several organizations, and a very respectable job as the Health Fair Chair for 2011.

If I hadn't reached out, there is no saying what I would be doing now. My involvement in campus organizations would not be as strong, and this amazing job opportunity would be missed, along with the opportunity to help teach this class, University Foundations. I feel that I am incredibly lucky to have been given the opportunities that I have. Volunteering at one organization has completely altered my future plans and gave me the experience that I need to go forward with my career.

Tori's Tale

Going away to college feels like you're going away to a different planet. At least for me, I was ready to move on to the next chapter of my life and be away from my parents. Coming from a town without any stop lights, Charleston was a change of pace for me. It felt like my hometown without actually being my hometown.

I found comfort in the fact that I had visited Charleston many times before for campus Open House days or freshman events, but I felt so alone. I had met my roommate a couple times, and we got along great, and I couldn't wait to see where my relationship with her would go. In the mean time, I checked my e-mail daily for updates on new student organizations and attended Pantherpalooza, an event where student organizations set up tables on the South Quad and distribute information to all who are passing. Pantherpalooza exposed me to all the student organizations out there, but I wasn't able to find anything that fit me.

My roommate and I became best friends for a while, and she really made me feel like I wasn't alone anymore. Until I found a student organization, I focused all of my energy on my classes, which turned out to be a good decision. One of my instructors made me feel right at home, making jokes and relating to me and my experience. Although I was the only freshman in her class at the time, I received the highest grade, showing my dedication to the class and its content. You see, it wasn't only a class to me- it was my future. The class was the first class I had enrolled in that had to do with my major—Business Education—and I fell in love with the material on day one.

The first few weeks of college went by quickly. Between adjusting to classes, building new friendships, and learning my way around Charleston, I hardly had time to worry about matters happening in my hometown. I enjoyed having the independence college gave me, and I knew I had made the right choice when I started calling Eastern my home after only a few days.

As the year progressed, my roommate started making decisions that I didn't feel were right for me. We grew apart, and the only friend I seemed to have was a friend that lived down the hall from me in my residence hall. Although her and I remained close for the rest of the year, when I moved into my apartment my sophomore year and got involved in a serious relationship, our friendship dwindled. We were not involved in the same activities and did not live near each other anymore, causing us to go our separate ways. Throughout my freshman year, the only constant I seemed to have was my professor that encouraged and supported me. She seemed to be struck by my drive and initiative. She introduced me to several business organizations on campus, which I fell in love with, and I eventually made new friends within these organizations that had the same interests I did.

This professor really made me feel like I belonged at Eastern, and the success I had in my classes made me feel like I was right for college. Transitioning from high school to college, and from one set of friends to a new set of friends, and even from one student organization to another was easy when I realized that I could put my efforts towards something I enjoyed doing- in this case, being a scholar in my major of Business Education. I enjoyed all of the new knowledge I had gained, and I thirsted for more. My energy was channeled so I had no time to be upset, angry, or sad - instead, I focused on doing well and proving to myself that college was right for me. Some may call me a geek or nerd, and some may call me weird, but I found joy in learning.

As a freshman, I didn't realize the importance of putting yourself outside of your comfort zone. I experienced friendship, betrayal, loneliness, and eventually friendship again as I found my way through the university. The most important thing I could have heard from an upperclassman is to be sure to expose yourself to new ideas and make friends outside of your small circle, because you never know when these outside friends could, in fact, become some of your best friends. I was a bit of a late starter with this, and I paid for it with many nights alone and homesick while other people were out socializing. However, I eventually found my way, and am loving Eastern and all it has to offer.

Dana's First Days

Leaving my home in Rockford, IL was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. I said "bye" to all my friends, and we parted ways and gave gifts to each other. Leaving for school wasn't real to me until literally the night before, when I said goodbye to my high school sweetheart. That same Thursday morning, after all the packing and complaining, I still had one more thing to do—drop my dogs off at the kennel. Normally, I hate my dogs, they are two little black, conniving, spoiled pug dogs, but they're my babies.

After that final goodbye, I literally cried in the car all the way to Eastern until we hit Lincoln Avenue. I was afraid of a new place; I live 4 hours away, and I knew I would not be going home a lot, so I had to get used to it. I felt a little better that my roommate was one of my great friends from home, although I was nervous about rooming with a friend, Aiesha was unforgettable.

I chose Eastern because Northern was too close; Southern was way too far; Marquette was out of state and too expensive; Lewis University and St. Xavier offered me scholarships but they both really weren't something I was interested in. EIU offered something that I hadn't noticed on

Samantha's Story

Although I spent my first two years of college transferring schools and attempting to figure out what I wanted to "be when I grew up," I finally found my place after transferring here to Eastern my junior year. Any big move in life can be somewhat difficult, but the transition to a state university proved to be one of the most difficult I had encountered yet.

I immediately moved in with some friends of mine from high school, but finding my niche was not nearly as easy. Between the homesickness, meeting new people, and the constant temptations to do everything but homework, I knew I had a lot to learn about being in college. The three girls I moved in with had spent the last two years of their lives here, and unfortunately I had not. Rather then rely on them to show me the ropes, I chose to do it myself.

Unlike most of the other juniors here at EIU, I found myself lost and wandering around campus, many times wondering which direction I was supposed to be going in to get to where I needed to be. I walked through endless hallways in Coleman trying to find those four little numbers that indicated that I was at the right classroom. Heck, I even sat in a class once, only to find out it was not at all where I was supposed to be. Although some of these situations can be embarrassing and even humiliating at times, it is so important to remember that we have all been there before.

My peers, new friends, professors, and fellow classmates helped me immensely through this transition period. In getting to know the people in my classes, I was able to ask for advice on just about every college matter I could possibly be concerned about. I quickly found that seeking guidance and familiarizing yourself with your classmates and professors is a must here at Eastern. Within the first few weeks of classes, I felt like I knew more than even my roommates (who had been here for 2+ years) did.

Although I realize that the transition in to college is much easier said than done, I promise it will go by so fast. Soon, without even having to think, you will end up where you need to be, being on time may be a different story. You'll make tons of new friends and may even lose others in the process. You'll fall in love and get your heartbroken, probably more than once. And by the time you are my age, you'll look back on everything you've been through and realize how much you've grown. After all, college is just that, a learning experience.

So, in this time of transition when you feel like no one understands or is going through what you are, realize that there is always someone out there who has been in your shoes. If that doesn't give you the peace of mind needed, then call home or come talk to me. I would be more than happy to help in anyway I can.

Dana's First Days continued

other campus—welcoming faces, smiles, and enthusiasm. Other campus tours were like watching an infomercial, while EIU made sure that I had a great time while learning.

My first few weeks were spent eating in Taylor Dining for the chicken strips everyday for lunch. The first few days, Aiesha and I walked around the floor in Carman Hall looking around and meeting girls; our community turned out to be the best community in our building. I will never forget the girls or my Resident Assistant from 8 North. My mother always told my brother and me, "When it comes to college and making friends, you need to start small, start with your roommate, then branch out to the girl next door, and the girl next door to her and so on." I know one can't be friends with just their floor mates, but the fact that I knew I always had someone to go and talk to was always a great thing. Living in Carman, we were all freshman, all homesick, and all so young. My niche was finding laughter in every situation. This was the only thing I really remember doing every single day last year, even when I had a bad day, I was blessed because there is always something to smile about.

Now being a Resident Assistant, I understand how certain girls can feel left out. Then, I felt as if it was a duty for me to get to know each and every one of the girls on my floor. Although it didn't work that I met absolutely everyone, I still made sure I tried. Now, this is my job and I get paid to know my residents, but it goes beyond the money in this position. I feel as if I'm in charge of that first year transition from high school or community college to a university.

The one thing I wish an upperclassman would have told me when I was a freshman would be to take more time planning out my course schedule and to simply live life. My schedule was always pretty unorganized and screwed up because I never sat down and made a set calendar or outline of my days.

As far as living life goes, there were times last year when I forgot I was only 18. Life is way too short, why not live it up! My advice to incoming first year students would be the same, you can't relive your freshman year so you might as well enjoy it.

Raquel's Freshman Year

I have always wanted to go away to college. I could honestly say that it had been a dream of mine since kindergarten. I told everyone, when they asked and when they didn't, that I planned on one day leaving home, going off to a university somewhere (not a college, but a university) and living on campus.

When the chance finally came, it's safe to say that it was everything I thought it would be, but at the same time, I had no clue what I was getting myself into. I wasn't worried about being away from home or about how I was going to survive college-level classes. While being completely excited about those things, being in this kind of environment terrified me. I was afraid of teachers and their so-called "office hours." The last thing I wanted to do was meet with a professor in his office; I had heard about those stories. I was scared of students. I had seen the movies. I had seen the pictures. The world of fraternities, sororities, toga parties, binge drinking and drugs – it was a world I didn't want to be sucked in to. It made me afraid to walk around campus at night. I made sure to walk fast and steer clear from all bushes and dark, shadowy corners where possible attackers might lurk.

My greatest fear though, without a doubt, was having people find out that I was a freshman. This all started when I got lost the first night I moved in. I couldn't seem to find my way from the South Quad back to Carman, so I called the only person I knew: my roommate. But the "why don't you know this?" tone I heard in her voice let me know that she apparently had this all figured out. I felt like I was falling behind compared to the other freshman. A lot of them walked in and out of places as if they had been living there for years. If I couldn't relate to other freshman, what chances did I have of relating or not coming across as "dumb" to anyone else on campus? I was paranoid, thinking that once I was called out as a "new girl", I would be given faulty advice, led to the wrong places, etc. My mind filled up with up with so many scary possibilities that I tried everything possible to make sure my identity as an underclassmen was never discovered. I would rarely ask for directions, which got me into a lot of unnecessary trouble, like standing in what wasn't a bus stop for two hours at 11:00am on a Sunday, when the bus doesn't start running until 2:00pm on the weekends. It was a daily hassle, acting as though I wasn't lost when walking through a building or that I wasn't lonely eating by myself in the dining centers. But I wasn't willing to break out my shell and trust anyone.My troubles began to lessen a bit when I started working. Through work-study, I was hired as a student worker in the School of Continuing Education in Blair Hall. One of my duties was to deliver portfolios and packages to different departments and offices all through campus. I quickly learned my way around. I met many people and became familiar with many well-known names, such as Brenda Major from Admissions and Dr. William Perry, our University President. I learned which offices took care of what, like the Registrar, which deals with transcript requests, along with the handling of many other important documents and records. Having this kind of knowledge gave me a confidence I don't think I would have developed any other way. What also helped was making friends with other freshmen. Along with two girls from my floor, we explored a world that was outside of classes, our rooms and the Carman dining center. Hanging out with other more "adventurous" students helped me to feel better about taking steps towards trying new things. We went to all kinds of different places, like hidden study corners in the Library, the Union and the Student Rec Center. It gave me the start I needed. Once I saw that there wasn't anything to be afraid of, I began to take steps towards traveling on my own. By the end of my freshmen year, my parents commented on how confidently and calm I strolled through campus, as if I had lived here all my life. In a way, that's exactly what it felt like. Once I had learned my way around and all that EIU had to offer, I had to openly admit that, yeah, this had become home for me.If I had ever been given the chance to hear advice from an upperclassman, it would have helped to know that college isn't as bad as the media portrays it to be. Not everyone is here to party; some actually come for the education. Teachers are insanely kind and helpful; most want nothing more than for their students to succeed. Other students, as well as staff on campus, are more than happy to help you out if you need it. They know what it's like to feel lost and scared. They've been there and done it once upon a time. They know what you need best and how you can get it. Hang out with other freshmen, for sure, but don't let loneliness drive you to be with people who make you feel uncomfortable, can possibly get you into trouble or who have different priorities, such as partying over studying; in the end, it's never worth it. My hope is that other freshmen can learn from my mistakes and that my experiences can help lessen the fears that come with the first year in college.

Caitlyn's Case

I couldn't have been any more excited to leave home in August of 2008. My mom and I fought all the time, and I had the stereotypical, "I hate this town" attitude. I was more than ready to get out. I chose EIU because my sister went here, and in all honesty, I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to even major in. I didn't know what to expect once I got to Eastern, I just knew I was ready to get there.

As soon as I moved in, I wanted to make friends. I tried talking to the girls on my floor, and while I did grow close with them, some of them just didn't want to talk. It's kind of a rude awakening. You go in thinking that everyone is in the same boat, ready to make friends, but then you realize that not everyone is like you, and not everyone is going to like you. I got

Megan's Friends

When I moved into Eastern, I was very nervous but excited at the same time. I grew up in the same small town all my life and had known all of my classmates. My roommate, Moria, had also come from a town very similar to mine. We hit it off right away.

I got all moved in and started meeting the girls on my floor. I have a picture of Moria, me and my other friend, Julia, from move in day. I don't remember how we all met, but it was the beginning of a great friendship.

My floor was an honors floor, so the girls that lived on it would soon be in many of my classes. The girls on my floor plus my best friend from high school became my group of friends here. I enjoyed getting to know my friends better and enjoyed living in Andrews.

Julia and my friend Jennifer were both Catholic like me. We all started going to mass together each week and joined the Haiti Connection that was provided through the Newman Catholic Center. This organization became a big part of my life. I was very active within it, and at the end of my freshman year, I became the chair of the group. Throughout the year, I became more involved in the Newman Catholic Center and started to meet people there.

Three of my friends and I also joined a service sorority where we met other girls who wanted to do good works. This provided me with opportunities to get to know Eastern and its students better but also the community. The first few weeks of my freshman year were a fun time. My friends and I attended all the opening week activities and took advantage of the fun. I felt like I belonged at Eastern because my friends helped me enjoy the experience. I was homesick a little bit, but my friends soon became my family.

I am very glad that found organizations that I enjoyed early on. Looking back I wish I would have gotten more involved in other activities, but I do think that being involved even in just a couple groups helped me adjust and find my spot on campus. It is important to meet new people and to find some activity that you enjoy. A student does not have to be best friends with his or her roommate, but a student should try and find someone whether in a class or group that he or she can relate to. Some of my friends have changed since my freshman year but they were there that year and helped me enjoy my year and find my spot on campus.

Caitlyn's Case continued

very lucky though with the friends that I did make.

Being a resident assistant for two years may make me biased, but if you don't establish a good relationship with some of the people on your floor, your freshman year isn't going to be all that it could be. My floor was my niche, and eventually the department of Housing and Dining would be too. If you don't get along with the people on your floor, you're not going to enjoy living where you do. You do so much in your residence hall, sleep, hang out, bathe, study, that if you don't enjoy yourself in one way or another living there, you're not going to enjoy your freshman year. Everyone has to live in the residence hall their freshman year, just remember that.

With that said, I knew I couldn't just be friends with girls on my floor even if they were the best friends I had. If you're only friends with people on your floor, you're missing out, and also, when you get annoyed with all of them, where are you going to go?

I was in band all throughout high school, so I knew I wanted to somehow get involved with the music department. I joined one of the volunteer concert bands, and met people through that. I also showed up to Hall Council in my residence hall . I also went to a few organization meetings, and eventually joined the service sorority Epsilon Sigma Alpha. Even if you only go to one meeting for an organization, you'll get something out of every meeting. You'll either meet someone new, or find something you're interested in, or maybe it'll steer you in the direction of something you are interested in. If I wasn't involved in various organizations my freshman year, my freshman year could have gone completely different.

My sister was here for the first semester of my freshman year. She's one of my best friends, so I was thankful she was here, but I wasn't dependent on her, and I was thankful for that. She gave me great advice on all sorts of things, and if I just needed to escape, her apartment was a great place for me to go. It's awesome to know people ahead of time before getting here from back home, but you have to establish yourself at Eastern. My sister got me involved in the service sorority that I am now the president of. I have met a lot of great friends through the sorority, but I met *my* friends through it, not her friends. If you only stick with your friends from home, you're going to miss out on a lot of great people.

College is about trying new things, and meeting new people. In your first semester here go to as many different events as you can. I did, and eventually I found where I belonged. I belonged to a few different places I found, and you may too. Don't limit yourself. Also, don't be afraid to start a conversation with someone else. Not everyone you meet your first semester will still be your friend as you walk across that stage in a few years, but some of them will.

Kate's Case

My choice to attend Eastern Illinois University was not easy by any means. When visiting colleges, I was 99 percent sure I would attend McKendree University in Lebanon, Illinois. Most of my family had attended college there so it was no surprise I would at least consider attending there. My sureness in attending McKendree did not stop me from at least visiting other colleges, just in case I found one that I preferred more. My college visits led me to Eastern, and I was so pleased with the campus I decided to return for another visit. I fell in love with the campus and the friendly faces I was surrounded by. Though my time at Eastern has not always been easy, I absolutely know I made the right choice in coming to college here.

As I entered my residence hall on freshman move in day, I was overly giddy. I knew I would be leaving my family for the first time and living on my own seemed so exciting. My roommate and I shared the same feelings about an eagerness to move away and meet new people and have new experiences. In a sense, my first few weeks of school felt like a summer camp. I knew I was away from home, but the reality of being on my own for an entire school year had not set in. It was not until the middle of my first semester at Eastern that I got home sick. I started to miss my family and miss the company of my two little brothers. My problem at this point in time was that I was not involved in much at all on campus. I had attended an EIU Republicans RSO meeting and had been attending the Wesley Foundation worship on Wednesday nights, but I was not meeting new people at these two activities. I started to wonder if I had really made the right choice in attending Eastern, and I began to contemplate transferring to another school.

Second semester changed my whole outlook though. A girl on my floor had approached me about joining a service sorority with her. I agreed to at least go to the rush meeting to see what it would be like. After attending the meeting I decided that Epsilon Sigma Alpha would be a good fit for me and that it would be a great way to get involved on campus and meet new friends. I immediately became busy with ESA events as a pledge which helped me to feel more at home at Eastern. I also became more involved at the Wesley Foundation and during spring break went on a mission trip. The mission trip helped to break the ice between myself and others in the group and I finally felt like I belonged.

The new friends that I had made with all the activities I became involved in and the continued friendship of my roommate and a few other girls on my floor had helped me to love Eastern. I have continued to belong to the groups that I first got involved with my freshman year and am still very close friends with all of the girls I met on my floor. I belong at EIU and would not see myself at another school. The close-knit community, close commute to all my classes, and close friends keep me from wanting to ever leave the quaint town of Charleston, Illinois.

Anna's Story

I felt very out of place my freshman year at Eastern. I didn't really know too many people who went to school here, and I was a very shy person. I met some people, but I still just didn't feel right. I didn't feel at home. Because of this I would go home very often. I just felt more in place there.

It wasn't until I started getting involved that I started to feel more like Eastern was home. I didn't realize how many clubs and organizations Eastern had. One thing led to another and all of a sudden I was involved in multiple things. I was meeting so many people all the time. I got such a great boost of confidence.

Joining different clubs and organizations also helped me learn about myself and change. I wasn't a shy person any more. I became very outgoing and sure of myself, which helped in many areas of my life, from job interviews to meeting new people.

I was also usually the type of person who would rather stay at home and read a book than to really socialize. I came to college with the expectation that all everyone did was party and that was not something that I was interested in doing. I made group of friends who felt the same way about parties, and I learned that we could hang out and have fun without going to a party. This helped me to open up and be more social with different people. I still like to have time for myself but now it is not as often.

All in all, college really helped me to open up and find a person that I never knew was in me. If you would have asked me what I expected to learn in college I never would have answered with what I said above. I'm getting way more than just a college degree.

Alex's Freshman Year

Like most incoming freshmen, when I came to EIU I had never lived away from home. I remember the excitement twinged with nervousness I felt on move-in day. Would I adjust? How will my girlfriend back home and I handle the distance? How am I going to meet friends? How hard will classes be?

Within the first few weeks, most of my questions were answered. The adjustment went well, and I was comfortable being on my own within a few days; the girlfriend and I didn't make it much past the first two weeks. I met and became close with a group of friends, and classes were challenging yet manageable.

Freshman year was full of a lot of ups and downs, but looking back I wouldn't change a bit of it. Meeting a group of friends on my floor was a huge boost for me. They were my support system if things weren't going well; they helped me get comfortable in the college setting, and they were a heck of a lot of fun. Even three years later, we have remained close.

I saw every event as an opportunity for growth, and that helped me through all of it. Even the breakup wasn't too bad once I stepped back and thought about it. It allowed me to be more autonomous and submerse myself in college life instead of being tied up back home. I had more of a chance to get out and try new things like intramural dodge ball and an internship.

If I would have gotten any advice from an upperclassman, I would have liked to hear about how easy it is to meet people. I was nervous about that from the get go, but I didn't need to be, especially for the first few weeks. At the beginning of the year, everyone is new and looking to meet friends. Just leave your door open or walk around. Friends will find you.

Colleen's Story

As I transitioned to EIU, I was overwhelmed. I have never been away from home before, and now I had to go to a new place I have never been before.

On my drive to Eastern to move in I was scared. I walked into the doors of Andrews Hall, and I saw a lot of people. It was chaos. There were so many people moving in, so much stuff, and so many welcoming people. I checked in with hall council members and then got my keys from the RA's. Now I was ready to move in.

I put my dad in the elevator line, and my mom, my brother, and I walked up 4 flights of stairs, many times, to bring stuff to my room. After I moved in, it was time for my family to leave. For me this was not really as an emotional time as it may have been for other students.

After I moved in, I was so excited to get my room together, meet everyone, and go to all the activities on campus. After my parents left, I unpacked my room and was ready to start the year.

The first weekend was so much fun! I met everyone on my floor, got to know my RA, ate dining hall food, went to all the opening activities, got my textbooks, found my classes, and had so much fun! The first few weeks as a freshman were fun! I was leaning new things, meeting new people, and loving it. I started getting involved on campus by joining organizations. I knew I wanted to get involved, get involved in everything, and get involved fast. I started getting involved in housing, campus events, and organizations in my major. In my first few weeks of school my goal was to be very social. I met so many people in my classes, in my building, and on my floor.

I transitioned to Eastern really well. I was not homesick and I loved school. The person that helped me belong at Eastern was my RA. She was always there for me, and she encouraged me to get involved on campus. My RA also helped me make my friends, because she had us get together as a floor to meet each other. My RA was there for me and helped me transition to Eastern. I made connection with people and I got involved in organizations on campus, and through that I knew I belonged at Eastern.

I have two pieces of advice I would give to freshmen. My first piece of advice to freshmen is to GET INVOLVED! I think this is huge, and involvement in organizations make you feel like you are a part of Eastern and you belong to something.

Getting involved could mean going to meetings, joining an organization, or being an executive board member. There are so many organizations you can choose from. You can join organizations in your major, get involved in housing, get involved in your hall, get involved in student senate, get involved in University Board, or getting involved in a Greek organization. Getting involved makes you part of an organization and part of Eastern.

Another piece of advice I would give is to break out of your shell. Don't be afraid to meet new people. I broke out of my comfort zone and went up to people to meet them. I would introduce myself to people on my floor and I would introduce myself to people in my classes. I made friends by being outgoing and taking the first initiative. I went up and talked to people and I didn't wait for people to come up to me.

Allen's Story

Driving down Highway 16 towards Charleston on that August day may have been the scariest thing I have ever done. The amount of unknowns that I was getting myself into was at an extreme level. There were many things however that helped make my transition to a college student easier.

One way that I found my niche at EIU was immediately getting involved with programs on campus that gained my interest. I joined the Eastern Marching Band and met many people with the same interest and likes as me. Having a group of people that I could relate to and share the confusion of being a new student with, made the first weeks at EIU much easier than expected. Some of my closest friends today at EIU I met during the first weeks of being on campus.

I learned through the initial weeks that at any given time you have the potential to meet a lot of people. Not all will be people that you want to surround yourself with, but introducing yourself, and making an attempt to get to know people is vital to the success of a freshman college student.

As a freshman, one of the greatest pieces of advice that I ever got, was to always be watching your first impression. In college you meet a lot of students, professors, and people who can potentially have an impact on your future career. It is important to make yourself known through an organization or a group of friends, but just as important is making yourself known with professors. Depending on your chosen major becoming closely acquainted with some professors may have a great influence on your future career and placement. College is the first step towards networking between friends and educationally. There is no better way to ensure that each encounter is positive than by taking note of your first impressions.

College is a time to most importantly find yourself. There are many different opportunities at Eastern; I have learned to help find the perfect group of friends or niche. There are many extremely simple ways to get involved and meet great friends. Easy meetings like Hall Council or a student organization can completely change the outlook of your college experience.

One of my friends once told me, "If you are not having fun at Eastern, you just haven't found the right group of friends to keep you occupied." With thousands of EIU students finding a niche is extremely easy to do. I never settled for being bored, and staying involved will only make my college experience greater, and more fulfilled.

Being away from home you will learn the importance of being involved and having a good solid group of friends. During one of my first weekends at EIU, I was in an ambulance heading to Mattoon with a severely dislocated knee. If I hadn't had taken the initiative to get to know my roommate, I would have made that trip alone. My roommate felt obligated to come, and support me through the long night of pain ahead. I credit getting to know him and connecting through interests to our great friendship today.

I learned through those first weeks that having a great friend and resources is vital to life at college. The friends and professors that I have met are making my years at Eastern the best of my life. I will never forget the first drive into Eastern, because that was when I started a new chapter of my life. A chapter filled with great friends and memories.

Kenisha's Tale

My freshman year was one of exploration and adaptation. Eastern Illinois University was the farthest I'd been from my family for more than a few days at a time. A lack of knowledge and wisdom lead me in many different directions throughout these first eight months of my adulthood, and I've grown immensely from the experience.

Because of an extreme preoccupation I had with my grades, I did not get a job. Rather, I focused on adapting to the new lifestyle. I learned patience from living with a complete stranger, communication with fellow organization members, and independence due to expected autonomy of all students. I also wasn't sure what challenges I would encounter.

The only major problems I had were financial and social. I went ahead and took advantage of loan opportunities and did not apply for any scholarships. I've learned my lesson. My social life always came after academics, but sometimes it inevitably interfered: My roommate, a day-sleeper, refused to have the lights on or the window-shades open at 3 pm when I arrived home. For this reason I discovered the library and, upon that, my best friend Gerald, an upperclassman, who became my largest influence and ultimately made me the person I am today. He helped me break learned stereotypes and see life's opportunities in creative ways.

Luckily, I never felt homesick. In fact, I was always coming up with excuses not to make the four-hour trip home. I built a sturdy social life and found the diversity EIU had to offer amongst its students. I found my place here when I became part of several organizations. They all had goals similar to mine, and I took from them what I was lacking prior to college. I became less opinionated and more logical. I began to understand the difference between my needs and my wants.

Although I've discovered something new about my university each year, I believe I was a well-rounded student after my first two semesters, taking advantage of various organizations and events on and off of the campus. A sturdy social life and a promising attitude made me a successful student my freshman year.

Lauren's Tale

Remember when your parents left you to go to the checkout in the store or even to the car because you were taking entirely too long in the toy or electronic section of Wal-Mart or Target? Deep down you have a feeling that your mom or dad is in the area, however, where exactly? For a minute you take being abandoned seriously because you think they actually drove off and left you and you would become an orphan forever. But then you catch a glimpse of your mother's head or your father's stature right there by the register, and you automatically regain hope and are so thankful.

On August 17th 2009, I was in the big store called "college" and I wanted to see if my parents were just at the checkout waiting for me to find them. But it wasn't quite like that, I was left to go through all the departments of this big store and purchase the tools I needed to create my own foundation. Now it was up to me to utilize the customer service in order to gain more guidance than what I had learned from my loved ones at home.

In order to find my niche here at Eastern, it definitely took time; however, such classes like University Foundations helped me get involved and become informed about all of the things that I needed to help build my character. Another action that had to take place in order for me to make Eastern my own was the ability to create that comfort with my instructors. Making sure they knew my name, and I knew their teaching style, made sure that I knew how to keep in contact with them for help.

Noticing the many resources on campus develops a sense of caring and commitment to serving students that want to excel. During my transition time, it was hard I must say. It was the feeling of April fool's day when my parents left; however, it was clearly August.

I gained confidence in myself within the fourth week because I realized that my parents would not have invested in me without trusting that I would do well in college. Even now, I keep that as an important reason to succeed because of the long time investment and expectations they bestowed upon me. During my first year at Eastern, the many things offered here at Eastern caught my attention. I wanted to be involved, but I was afraid that it would affect my work ethic. By second semester, I let go of the edge of the pool and dove into the many opportunities, especially dealing with the minority community. I became an active member of NAACP and moved up to the executive board position.

I also realized that I could be involved in something that I love, music. I played clarinet for many years in middle and high school and was intimidated by the possibility of playing at a collegiate level. However, I lost that mentality and I said I deserve the right to play just as anyone else and I have been involved in the band here at Eastern ever since.

As I said before, the transition can seem as something incredibly overwhelming and impossible, however, remember why Eastern chose you. Remember that all of the tools that you have learned at home will develop even more in this type of environment because you are learning for yourself. As an upperclassman it is essential to tell this information to underclassmen so that they can gain confidence within themselves and take college seriously. This big store has definitely helped me become the person that I am, and I will greatly honor a position in customer service to help those, at times, lost students.

Barbara's Story

During my freshman year, I struggled quite a lot with making friends and adjusting to this new lifestyle that lay before me. I felt thrown into undiscovered territory, forging my way through obstacles I had not even heard of previously. What made my year so difficult, though, was my roommate dropping out.

April was not merely a random girl placed with me; she was my best friend from high school. We made a pact to look out for one another and to have as much fun together as humanly possible. This unfortunately did not occur.

About a week into school, April decided college life was not for her. I begged and pleaded with her to stay and stick it out, but to no avail. I was left alone in a very overwhelming place. The first weeks alone were unbearable. Constantly calling my mother, I cried to her asking to come home immediately.

Once fall sorority recruitment began, everything changed. I had always walked past the recruiting tables, never stopping to even glance. My mother and father went through the Greek system when they attended classes at Western Illinois University, so I was not close-minded. I thought, though, that maybe holding off one year would be a better choice. How could someone juggle the responsibilities of a sorority while trying to focus on school and other clubs too?

One day, out of seemingly nowhere, I walked up to a table and asked where to sign up. Going through the process, I met many people who seemed interested in being my friend and getting to know me.

As soon as bid day came, I ran to Sigma Sigma Sigma, their arms wide open in welcome. Tri Sigma has helped me adjust, create genuine bonds, and learn more about myself. I have become a leader, and I thank my sorority for my confidence. I can honestly say I don't think I would be attending school if I hadn't put myself out there and taken those first few steps toward change alone.

Julia's Story

I came to Eastern Illinois University as a timid and shy but enthusiastic freshman three years ago. I came from a small community of 900 people, Shabbona, three and a half hours away from Charleston.

When my parents dropped me off at college, I remember looking out on campus from Andrews 802 wondering what the next four years had in store for me. Would I make friends? What would I major in? Would I find organizations to be involved in? I knew I would not find the answers to those questions by staring endlessly out onto the south quad, so I left my room and nervously wandered down the hall to say hello to a girl I had met briefly as we were standing in line for the elevator just a few hours before. I talked with her for a moment, and we made plans to get dinner together later that evening after we were all unpacked. In the meantime, I went and met my roommate who had just returned to the room. I had only talked to her briefly on the phone about who was going to bring the fridge, tv, etc., and I was a little nervous about meeting her.

I quickly discovered she did not share my intense enthusiasm about being in college. She was very quiet, and no matter how many times I would invite her to welcome week activities or to join Megan and me for dinner, she always declined.

On a more positive note though, Megan, the girl from down the hall, and I quickly became friends and started getting involved in hall events together. I met many of my friends while I was with her. She introduced me to her friend from high school who was also a freshman at EIU and Megan's roommate, Moria. We are both Catholic, so we went to mass at Newman together and got involved in the Haiti Connections there.

We went to welcome week activities, hall programs and we attended our first hall council meeting together. That hall council meeting is what started it all. My RA, Leslie, nominated me for the Andrews Hall Homecoming Representative position; I gave a speech, and I was elected! I attended the weekly homecoming meetings which I quickly discovered were predominately Greek and brought all of the information back to the hall.

I was very overwhelmed at the first homecoming meeting. I was overwhelmed by the intense enthusiasm the Greek organizations showed, and I was overwhelmed being one of 4 residence hall representatives there. I was not really sure why the other 8 residence halls had not sent anyone; all I knew is that I wanted to bring all of the homecoming spirit back to Andrews Hall. That is exactly what I did.

I got the residents involved in the events throughout the week and we won in the residence hall division, and we also won best "float" in the parade as we walked the route cheering and showing our Andrews Hall pride. From that moment I knew I wanted to stay involved in residence life for the remainder of my four years at Eastern.

I continued my involvement throughout the semester as I attended Residence Hall Association (RHA) meetings and went on retreats and conferences. At semester I had two distinct groups of friends: my floor/hall council/ RHA friends and my Newman friends.

As the first semester of my freshman year came to an end, I found out Emily, my roommate, would be leaving EIU to go to Disney World for an internship, leaving me without a roommate. My floor was very close, we were an honors floor, so we had many classes together, many of us were in the Association of Honors Students, and we all seemed to have very similar interests.

Through Becky, I met Lisa who lived on the 7th floor and was having roommate problems. After only having met Lisa a handful of times, I suggested that she move in with me at the semester. She was an amazing roommate! We talked all of the time, we went to eat together, and she introduced me to a whole new area of involvement: music.

Although I played in band for 8 years, I had chosen not to do it in college. Through Lisa I discovered how much I really missed it as I attended her concerts, marching band performances, and met her friends. As the second semester came to an end, I was sad to leave all of my new friends that I had made throughout the past 9 months. I had decided to live on campus in the Andrews Hall once again for my sophomore year. I would be living with Megan; I would stay involved in hall council and RHA, I would continue to go to Newman events, and even though Lisa, Becky, and Moria were moving to McKinney Hall, I would still stay in touch with them and attend their concerts.

I entered EIU as a timid and shy freshman, and as I left EIU for the summer at home on May 9, 2009, I was no longer that timid and shy freshman, I was a strong and confident sophomore enthusiastic to return to campus in just 3 short months.