

## A Reflective Journey: Navigating Your Cumulative Experience at Iowa State University

By: Alex Brown

When I chose my adventure at Iowa State, I truly had no real idea what college was going to be like. I thought that as a Computer Engineering major, I would be coming here to become the absolute expert in my field, but that's not what you do in college. In college, you learn to learn. You don't become the expert in your field, but you do end up an expert in the art of learning who is also very good at your field. When I go off into the world, there is no way that I will have learned everything I need to know about computer programming in order to do everything at a specific job, but I will have been trained well by Iowa State to adapt well to any specific ways of doing things that my employer could want me to do.

My time at Iowa State started out rough, school had always been a breeze for me and I wasn't ready to struggle, and struggle I did. Calculus 2 hit me like a truck, but I got through it. My second semester was better. I was more adjusted to life in college and I had found my people. I began attending and volunteering for events put on by the Student Union Board here on campus. It is so important to find your people outside of class. We are constantly hearing about the need for a work-life balance and we need to remember that while we are in college our job is school. Even though my ability to work through stress improved with every semester I completed in college, I do not think that I would be finishing my degree if I had not found my release in the Student Union Board. Since my beginnings in it I have served a term as Director of Performing Arts, and am currently serving one as the Director of Special Events in the group. As the Performing Arts Director, I got to host events such as Open Mic Night, Grandma Mojos Improv

Comedy and Comedy Night where we would bring full fledged comedians to the Maintenance Shop in the Memorial Union. Now as Special Events director, I am coordinating the special guests that come to ISU AfterDark three times a semester. I cannot stress enough how important finding a club like this was to my experience here at Iowa State University.

When it comes to academics, I have realized that I do not feel like I am learning things. When I say this, I do not mean that I am not learning things. I mean that I am learning things in such a natural way that it doesn't feel like I'm learning through anything more than actual experience. I have most enjoyed and thrived in my project based classes. Some of these classes have been very tough. CPR E 381 comes to mind. A punishing but incredibly rewarding course. The thing about the difficult courses is that when you complete them, you feel incredibly accomplished and you gain a lot of confidence in your ability to be an engineer. As I said earlier, college is more about learning to be able to learn than it is about learning everything down to the minute detail and these project based classes force you into the real world experience of guiding yourself through solving problems.

One class that I would like to highlight specifically is COM S 309. In this class we broke into groups of four and developed an Android App over the course of a semester. We worked under the SCRUM model, planned and completed sprints and essentially simulated development life in a small startup. I absolutely loved it. I worked as a Front End Developer on an App called PetrolPal. PetrolPal was meant to help consumers find the cheapest gas around them and to make a "social media" for gas stations. Through completing this project I fell in love with app development and have decided that it is

what I would most like to do with my career. I was also named one of the Best Coders in my class.

I am currently getting to realize more of my app development calling while I take Senior Design. My group and I are working on a Butterfly Tracking App for Reiman Gardens. It is a wonderful project and it is doing an even better job of showing me what my career will be like post graduation and I couldn't be happier with it. Iowa State has had an incredible impact on my life. While I would have always wanted to become a computer programmer, there is no other place I would have wanted to become one. I feel like we are the best of the best and I cannot wait to see the doors that are opened from having had a great Iowa State education.