

News Release

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Media Contact –Danielle Rush

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Communications Specialist
2300 S. Washington Street
Kokomo, IN 46904-9003
(765) 455-9414
darush@iuk.edu

Campus experiences lead IU Kokomo graduate to a career in higher education

KOKOMO, Ind. — It is Monday morning, early, but Mary Olk is already on the job.

She perches on a chair in the middle of Starbucks, iced tea in hand, describing her newest idea for marketing the Indiana University Kokomo campus on social media, as part of the weekly Office of Media and Marketing planning meeting.

Later in the day, she walks through the campus quad, trailed by videographer Mike Glassburn. She's poised in front of the camera, as narrator of the "My Campus" videos, using her charm and dry, slightly sarcastic, sense of humor to draw stories from the featured students.

Olk also works on her computer, searching for just the right words for the latest installment in her popular Senior Spotlight series, featuring the most compelling stories about her classmates, both on the campus website and in IU publications.

Mary, a member of the graduating class of 2013, is a respected member of the marketing team.

"Being able to work in the campus marketing department was a dream come true," Olk, 21, said. "I have loved telling the story of IU Kokomo, meeting great people, and learning everything I did. I learned that I want to continue working in higher education, and it helped guide me to my decision to pursue my master's degree."

Marie Radel, director of the media and marketing department, said Mary's contributions are invaluable.

"Mary brings the student perspective. She knows how her peers interact on social media and what they want to see on the web," Radel said. "Marketing is about

understanding your target audience, and Mary is our front row seat to what students are thinking.”

Olk, who is from Peru, appreciated the chance to apply what she was learning in her communication arts classes to a real-world job.

“I developed and improved my writing skills, but I also was able to explore other areas in more depth, such as social media and photography,” she said. “It taught me the true inner workings of a marketing and public relations organization, and how a professional environment works.”

Her leadership and excellence in and out of the classroom landed her an assistantship at Ball State University, which will pay for her to earn a master’s degree in student affairs administration and higher education programming. She wants to help other students have the same kind of successful college experience she had at IU Kokomo.

“College isn’t just your classes, it’s getting practical real world experience,” Olk said. “I want to give students resources to set goals and achieve them. That’s what higher education is all about. I want to be part of that.”

Dean of Students Sarah Sarber said Olk will excel in this field.

“Mary will be a tremendous asset to the student affairs profession,” she said. “She has an understanding of current issues in higher education and appreciation for working with students, and truly wants to make a difference in their lives.”

Olk “jumped into student life with both feet” when she arrived on campus, determined to have a big college experience.

“It doesn’t matter where you go to college, you get to choose the type of experience you have,” she said. “If you get involved, you will feel a connection to any campus.”

She joined *The Correspondent* newspaper staff, and was instrumental in updating and improving it as editor-in-chief. She also was involved in student government, first as a senator, and then as student body vice president in spring 2013.

Her involvement helped her make friends, and feel like she was part of the campus.

“College isn’t just about having a degree anymore,” she said. “It’s everything on top of that. It was important to me to educate myself in every way possible.”

In May, she earned the outstanding student in leadership award, as well as the outstanding student in communication arts award.

One of her most important experiences was participating in the Innovation Symposium, a class that focuses on philanthropy, environment, and technology, and includes three weeks of travel in England.

“That was a life-changing experience,” Olk said. “Overseas travel teaches you a lot about yourself. The culture there is similar to ours, but still different. There’s so much history over there, it’s just fantastic. The trip is work, too. We’re having a good time, but we’re working, too.”

All students must complete a final project, creating an innovation that helps people. Olk developed an IU Kokomo leadership guide, intended to help students become more effective campus leaders.

She hopes her own experiences will make her a better student advocate when she begins her career.

“I know the first couple of years can be hard,” she said. “It’s made me more aware of the real things college students go through. I hope to create a positive experience for students, and impact them in a positive way so they finish school.”

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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