

Student Stories Project: Erin Datteri

Audio version available at: <http://www.alumni.indiana.edu/profiles/students/datteri.shtml>

[IU fight song]

Welcome to the Indiana University Student Stories Project, a production of the IU Alumni Association. I'm your host, Alana Salata. In this series, you'll get an insight into what it takes to be a student leader here at IU, from the perks –

“... driving around the Mexican National Youth Soccer Team in white minivans ... ”

– to the hard work –

“I was challenged during LeaderShape to come out of my shell a little bit more.”

– to the memories that will last a lifetime.

“This year we won Big Tens ... In college sports, winning a conference is, like, everything.”

Join me on this journey through the lives of IU student leaders.

[IU fight song]

SALATA: Today we're speaking with graduate assistant Erin Datteri of IU Bloomington's Student Alumni Association.

DATTERI: My name is Erin Datteri. I am a graduate student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program. I was a Colorado State University undergrad, and my degree there was in public relations. My hometown is in Evanston, Wyoming, and my position with SAA is the graduate assistant.

Why did you choose to attend IU?

I was looking at a lot of programs for graduate school. I went kind of around the country. I looked at programs that were highly rated, you know, that people knew, so that was originally why I came out here, but I chose IU because I got offered this assistantship. This is one of the highlights here is that I got to work with the director as it was then and all the ways that she had described what we would be doing with the students here. So that was a major part of why I chose to come out to IU. Also it was kind of the people, the beautiful campus that's out here, and just the program that I'll get to be in.

Tell me about a meaningful or enjoyable experience you've had at IU.

This is a difficult question, because there's been so many great experiences both within the Student Alumni Association and within my program, but I guess more specifically with SAA there's – I got to work with Homecoming this fall – which, unfortunately, we had the parade get rained out and the pep rally. But we still had a really great Yell Like Hell and just going to the football game and being able to go on the field with Sondra, the old director, when we gave out those awards, it was really exciting.

We also did LeaderShape over winter break, and that was just an incredible program – to be able to kind of see the students that went to it and how they developed over that week. I really got to see, like, the students that are directors in the Student Alumni Association that they went out there for the first time and just seeing the difference in them between before they went out and after and some of the things that they really gained and had a really strong direction about where they wanted to see SAA in the future. So that was, that was great. The best experiences out here.

I've gotten to help work on retreats with SAA, kind of putting together – in the fall and in the spring, when we bring the directors back in, kind of getting everybody together and refocusing about what we want the semester to be. So I got to participate in putting those together and kind of doing the fun parts and then the serious parts, and putting that all together has been great. Then there's, like, a million little experiences. I advise students, like, I'm the one with the Sam's Club card and I drive one of my students out there for the social that we're having or for the mass member meeting. So just having that bonding time in the car, picking up all the groceries and whatever, the food out there, that's fun too. So there's a million of those little experiences that I really enjoyed.

What advice would you give to incoming graduate students just starting out at IU?

I think graduate students and undergrad both, I would say find a way to get more involved than just what you're studying. Although that is really important and something that's got to be a priority on the list, but it's great to be involved outside of your studies and finding a way to connect to the university that's more than just what you're studying. I think whether it's a student organization, or just Big Brothers Big Sisters – the Student Alumni Association is obviously one I'm partial to – but I think that's advice I would give – is getting involved.

How did you find out about SAA, and why did you decide to become involved?

My assistantship is why I am in SAA. And when I came out to IU, you have to obtain an assistantship to be in the program. So I interviewed with several places. It's just like this big room of chairs and people interviewing – like, two staff members to one potential assistantship person. It's kind of an intimidating thing, but I really connected to Sondra and the outgoing graduate student. The things that they said that SAA was a part of – you know, Homecoming and all these events that we do are really fun. And then, just having that advising experience – that's what I want to do after I graduate, too, so it was a good way for me to gain more experience and that's, I guess that's how I got involved. You know, “I work here; I'd better be a member and find out more about it.”

Tell me about an SAA event or program you were involved in that you are particularly proud of.

One I didn't mention was Senior Salute, and that was just recently. It was great. It was rainy all day. I'd like to think it was meant to be, though, because it downpoured, like, at three and at, like, three-thirty it stopped raining and the sun even came out and so from four to six when our event was held it was just bright sunshine. While everyone was inside, all the students were able to go outside, too, and eat the free food. I loved our gift this year, the glass that said "IU Alumni" on it. We had over a thousand people come through in two hours, so that was pretty incredible that we had all those students get through there and make those connections with their new alumni groups, the constituent societies, and all those kind of things. So it was kind of an opportunity for them to see what being alumni would be like and the benefits, I guess, of doing that. So I think it was a good opportunity for everybody. And it was just fun, you know – live music, free food, free gifts. It was a great event.

How have your leadership skills developed over the course of your participation in SAA?

I've had the opportunity to work with some really great students and see how I can best help them do what they want to do. And that's really kind of my role, and there is certainly, you know, lots of different ways people like to be advised, and that's where I've developed probably the most from SAA.

What have you gained through your interactions with IU alumni?

The alumni that I've worked with has been either through Networking Nights, which is an event that alumni come in and it's usually around some sort of topic or subject that is career-related and then we have a panel of alumni that speak about what their careers look like and how they got into the field to interested students – students who either are majoring in that or are interested in going into that area of the field. And then afterward we have food and people can go up and ask questions, do the networking part, you know. I think that's been a good experience with me and getting to know some of our alumni and that they're excited about coming back and seeing students and kind of reminiscing about their experiences here and helping our current students get into the field that they are currently in and really give advice about how to best, I guess, get that job after they graduate. That's been a good experience with alumni.

I also have been working with some of my students who – there is a Monroe County Chapter of the Alumni Association, so that's Bloomington and the surrounding area, so alumni that are local around here – so when they have their chapter meetings, they meet in this building. And so in the Student Alumni Association, one of the students is a director of alumni relations as part of their job. So that will continue into next year – it has been an opportunity for SAA to be more involved with our local alumni chapter.

What other organizations are you a part of here at IU?

I am the vice president of the Indiana University Student Personnel Association, which is basically the governing body of the program that I'm in. So it's not too far away from what I do for class, but it's kind of the governing body of that.

What are your future goals, and how do you think IU has helped prepare you to meet those goals?

I want to work in student affairs, so that's what my graduate degree is in. IU has definitely helped me both academically, schoolwork-wise – I know that I've been learning a lot about student development – it's helped me both academically and practically because I'm – this is my assistantship, I work here 20 hours a week, so I'm half-time doing what I want to do after I graduate. So the Student Alumni Association has been that for me as well. Being in the field and working with students, and being able to see how things work at IU, how those, like, relationships are formed across the different areas of the school and how people can collaborate together. And all those things have been a good learning experience and being here and being able to to kind of do everything at once, learn and then apply it the next day, you know, that's been a great opportunity.

What will you miss the most when you graduate?

The people! – with a big exclamation point, you know. There's just been so many incredible people that I've met here – the Student Alumni Association folks, the directors, and my boss, and the people that I work with in the Alumni Association – but people in my cohort in my program have been incredible. They're my new family. I came from Wyoming and Colorado, but I came out to Indiana without knowing anyone. So these people are my family out here, you know, that I count on, so definitely that is what I'll miss the most. It's just been such a great environment to work in.

We've been talking with graduate assistant Erin Datteri of IU Bloomington's Student Alumni Association.

[IU fight song]

This series was produced by the Indiana University Alumni Association, with special thanks to the IU Marching Hundred and director Dave Woodley. I'm Alana Salata.

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