

2023: The Year of Change and Growth

Completing my time at Kankakee Community College in December of 2022, taking a semester off from school, and graduating KCC in May 2023 with a humbling 2.68 GPA; lessons were learned. Lessons that I can be immensely grateful to have learned in comfort of my hometown rather than at a university on a larger scale and with higher stakes. My time at KCC was not one that I am terribly proud of, I had little to no campus involvement, my GPA and grades did not reflect my true potential and, I had too many distractions from the fast life that comes with a small-town mindset. I felt stuck. I wouldn't even be admitted into my major because my GPA was so low. With my degree in hand, fresh off the stage, and full of celebration I made a vow that when I got to Illinois State University I would focus on academics solely. I would get a job, go to school, do homework, and have a friendship with my roommates. No parties, no extra-curricular activities, no new friends...no distractions. A vow that quickly broke after my first month on campus.

It is Fall semester of 2023; I am a transfer from a small town who came alone. I did have my roommates and another friend who lived in the same complex as me, that was enough for me; until it wasn't. I was put in contact with the IMPACT Movement, a Black Christian organization on campus where I began attending Women's meetings weekly. I enjoyed IMPACT but IMPACT wasn't enough. I then discovered the Black Student Union and began attending their monthly meetings as well as using my spare time to do my studying at the Multicultural Center. A place where Black students often come to congregate, where students feel comfortable, and at home. The MCC slowly became my own home. ISU students slowly noticed my consistent

presence leading into friendships and connections that have served me well and greatly improved my experience at ISU.

By the end of my first semester at ISU I had completed a plethora of community service events, joined the Student Wellness Ambassadors Team, Student Alumni Council, Black Caucus, Black Student Union, and began emphasizing my interest in sorority life. I decided that Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. was the sorority I was interested in as education and community service became something I wanted to emphasize in my own life. I entered my 2nd semester at ISU finally being admitted into my major with a 3.0 GPA, and real grit. I knew what I wanted for myself, for my future, and the vow I set at community college was not conducive to a life I wanted to live. I continued along my second semester being active in my organizations and making my face known on campus, maybe not my name quite yet but I was seen and that made me happy. The semester ended with my election to the Black Student Union executive board as the Community Service Chair, in my major, making friends, and a 3.2 GPA. A complete flip from what I imagined for myself a year prior.

Fall 2024. The semester that changed my life and showed me just how resilient I truly am. I was now an executive board member for BSU, hosting community service events twice a month, and attending weekly meetings. BSU was a job but one I loved. My interest in Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. and hard work paid off, I was invited for membership and began my process of intake. While in my process, I was enrolled in 5 classes, 2 clinical placements, BSU, and still working when I could. These things did not hold me back; they made me better. They made me stronger. I completed Fall 2024 as an inducted member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., hosted 6 community service events, and completed my semester with a higher GPA than what I entered with; 3.4 cumulative. The 3.5 I craved was near, I could accomplish that, and the

resilience I displayed this semester proved my ethic to myself. I knew I could complete anything I wanted; all I needed was a little bit of faith.

It is now the end of the spring 2024 semester, exactly one year until my graduation. I have completed my Kindergarten round of clinicals, finding my home there and leaving now knowing that Kindergarten is where I want to teach. My reign as community service chair ended as I decided to step down from the role and not serve another term. My leadership would not end with BSU but be picked up by Sigma as I have been elected to serve as the new Gamma Rho Chapter Epistoleus (Historian / Social Media Chair). I traveled to Costa Rica alongside an amazing group of people on New Years Day to remodel and reconstruct a local school, this trip was 10 days long, completing approx. 50 hours of service, and was life changing. At the end of this trip, I was offered the opportunity to serve again but as a trip leader. Amidst it all, I earned a 4.0 semester leaving me with the 3.5 GPA I had been working so hard for.

Had I listened to the 20-year-old girl who was disappointed in herself and emotionally decisive, I would not be the accomplished and blessed 22-year-old woman I am now. I will be graduating in Spring of 2026 having served my community and devoted myself to my own improvement. The change I felt and accomplished is one I wish to pour into other young people who may feel lost or are stuck; the CRAFT organization is a great way to gain contact with these young adults and to provide them with the resources and opportunities that I was blessed to receive. As I grow older and into my future career, I will never forget what CRAFT and its members have done for me. Any way possible that I can do the same for incoming or current college students I would love to do so. Blessings and lessons that I receive are ones to be shared and passed on for future generations and to be that piece of wisdom for the youth would be fulfilling.