Certainty

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I remember standing on the Iowa State University campus for the first time. I distinctly remember feeling like this is where I wanted to be. I had recently also visited the University of Minnesota Twin Cities and University of Wisconsin River Falls. University of Minnesota was too large, too unfriendly for my liking. My dad and I arrived to the “campus,” more like an extension of the Twin Cities, and seeing vulgar graffiti all over one of the buildings. When we went to River Falls, they were so disorganized that we were lost for a half an hour. Mind you, it is very hard to get lost there, as it is a tiny campus, so it took a major lack of effort on the admissions department for us to get lost. No signs, no person to greet us, nothing. Needless to say, I was less than impressed with these two colleges. The sizes were also not what I wanted, too big, too small.

The last place we visited was Iowa State. We were greeted almost instantly, welcomed by people who seemed like they were actually really happy to see us. The campus is beautiful with lots of grass and trees. While it is a pretty large campus, the way it is set up makes it seem smaller. There are kind of groupings of engineering buildings, science buildings, liberal arts and sciences, and other categories. The bus system is really organized. In fact, the whole university seems to be really organized. The difference was unbelievable. We left that day feeling that this was the university for me. We visited in May; I applied and was accepted in August 2010. It seemed like a quick decision, but definitely the right one.
Funny thing was, less than probably 4 months before visiting, I’d never even heard of Iowa State. While I was looking at vet schools I saw it on the list. I was also doing a mentorship shadowing with a veterinarian whose alma mater for his bachelor’s degree was Iowa State University. He suggested I should check it out, so I did. It looked like a nice place to consider. I am really glad I did. I considered it a happy medium between Twin Cities and River Falls. River Falls has about 2000 undergraduates and is in a town of 15,000. Twin Cities has over 65,000 undergraduates and is centrally located within the busy Twin Cities, which has over 3.5 million people.

After I was accepted into both Iowa State University and University of Minnesota Twin Cities, the two schools I applied for, I had a decision to make. The scholarship offers started coming in. The most the U of M would offer me was barely enough to buy books for a year. I remember getting the Iowa State offer in the mail. The first offer I was sent was for Awards for Competitive Excellence as an out-of-state student. I was really happy at this point. Within a week, I got the offer for the George Washington Carver Scholarship. I was ecstatic, however skeptical. While I was extremely grateful, I couldn’t believe that someone would offer me so much financial support without ever meeting me. While I had already fallen in love with Iowa State, this sealed the deal. As an out-of-state student, Iowa State would have been very expensive to go to for four years as an undergraduate. I owe it to this scholarship for getting me closer to my goals.

I went through senior year without second guessing this choice as everyone else was scrambling to apply for schools and pick a school. Even though I was a little reluctant about Iowa in general, I was thoroughly convinced that I had made the right decision. When someone says Iowa, most people think corn. While it is true Iowa is the corn state, and they indeed do
have a lot of corn around, there is so much more to it. When I leave my home in Rochester, Minnesota and come home to Ames, Iowa, I feel a sort of calmness, a slight push to take things slow and be somewhat relaxed. While I work very hard, I know it is still important to be able to relax once in awhile. I consider Ames my home, as I live here approximately 9 months out of the year.

While at Iowa State, I have discovered so much about who I am and who I want to be. As cliché as this is, it is absolutely true. I knew in high school that I wanted to go to vet school, and my education here is making that dream and goal become closer. By majoring in Animal Science, I have a lot of exposure to different types of animals. While I am fairly positive that I want to work with small companion animals, the exposure to dairy and beef cows, swine, poultry, equine, and other types of animals leaves these doors open. I have learned so much and there is no stop in sight.

During my first year, I took 30.5 credits. It was hard to adjust in the beginning, as it seemed like I was essentially starting over. No one from my high school came to Iowa State and only two others from high schools in Rochester. I think people are sometimes excited about the prospect of being able to be a new person, but I did not want to really be a new person. I just wanted to succeed. In the beginning, I felt slightly alienated. While I had a roommate, it was pretty clear that we were not going to “click” as well as I thought we would, and as I said, I really had no urge to be someone I was not. However, I did not realize how many people out there were feeling exactly the same as I was. We just needed to find each other and overcome the shyness that wouldn’t get us anywhere. Luckily, due to chance, chemistry, and the Women in Science and Engineering Program, I met a really solid group of friends that kept me going
through the difficult class work. Now I have been three semesters, and I love it and am enjoying Iowa State so much.

This second year has been harder. I am only taking 16 credits this semester, but I am taking difficult classes, both Animal Science and Organic Chemistry related. The longer I am here, the more major-specific classes I get to take. A lot of the generals seem unrelated and sometimes not very interesting. It is much harder to be invested in something that is unrelated or seemingly not able to be related to future work. Luckily, I am almost done with many generals. It was more difficult to cope this year, as everyone seemed to be busy. I still have a really good group of friends, just as solid, if not more, than last year. My support system was still there, but definitely preoccupied with their own work, not by choice, but by force. We have persevered though and will go home soon to recharge for the next semester. There is also of course friends from high school that keep me going as well.

The Ames community is great too. While I have not discovered maybe as much as others, I have found what I have seen to be great. I have become involved in the Central Iowa Symphony, which is a community orchestra consisting of people from around Iowa. I have played with the symphony for a whole year now, and it is a great way to interact with the Ames community and have an opportunity to play with an orchestra again. I was involved in orchestra all throughout high school and middle school and even elementary, and have been playing the violin for over 14 years. This semester, I also volunteered at the Octagon Arts Center for my sociology class. I got a better sense of the community through this as well.
However, since I am not from a farm or from anywhere rural even remotely, I often feel at a slight disadvantage. Since I am an animal science major with really no experience with livestock, it is hard to learn the material as easily. For example, I am taking equine science this semester. Over half the class owns horses. I have ridden a horse maybe once or twice in my life, when I was, say, 10. Not exactly much experience. I have to try harder to learn things that are common sense to people from farms and from the country. While this is sometimes frustrating, I learn to deal with it and I have started to embrace the great resources I have in these students from rural Iowa or other states.

Every time I come back to campus I think, it is good to be back. Excitement rushes through my head when I arrive. The slightly warm, calm breeze of fresh Iowa air, often paired with a slight smell of rural Iowa, passes through while I walk towards home. I walk through the dorms with my boxes, the hallways buzzing with excitement of a new semester, and it all feels absolutely right. This is where I am supposed to be right now, and I couldn’t be more grateful or happy.