

Student Stories Project: Sarah Mincey

Audio version available at: <http://www.alumni.indiana.edu/profiles/students/mincey.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 –

“The Alumni Association here at South Bend had selected me to go to IU Bloomington’s annual LeaderShape training program for a week.”

– to the hard work –

“Time management: it’s hard because I love the group so much and I just – I want to volunteer for everything and I want to do everything.”

– to the memories that will last a lifetime.

“I’ve met so many people that have touched my life in so many ways.”

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

[IU fight song]

SALATA: Today we’re speaking with Sarah Mincey of the SPEA Nonprofit Service Corps.

MINCEY: Hi, my name is Sarah Mincey. I’m a second-year graduate student at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs studying to get my master’s in public affairs in environmental policy and master of science in environmental science, with a specialized degree there in forest resources. I’m from Morehead, Kentucky. I grew up in the Daniel Boone National Forest and loved the forest, and that’s kind of what brought me here to study environmental policy. I have served as the coordinator of the Nonprofit Service Corps program at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs this past year. Outside of school, extracurricular activities include gardening, reading, playing with my pets.

Why did you choose to attend IU?

I chose to attend IU based on the School of Public and Environmental Affairs’ ranking. Their environmental policy and natural resource management program is No. 1 in the country. My father had attended IU for some graduate classes and turned me towards this direction, and the more research I did, the visits I did here, this just felt like home to me.

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

Probably the most meaningful experience has been serving as a co-chair for the Student Professional Enrichment Auction. This year was the second year that SPEA put on this event. It's completely student-run, graduate-student-run. We serve to raise money for unfunded internships and professional development opportunities that graduate students so desperately need to get out in the workforce. Having that experience is invaluable, and in fact, it's a part of the curriculum at SPEA, and so many of those internships and professional development opportunities are unfunded, and we saw this need and we felt like we could fill that by having an event. We planned an auction the first year I was here, and I was involved a little bit that year, but the second year I co-chaired the auction executive committee, took care of marketing and public relations, and it was an enjoyable experience simply because I got to work with wonderful graduate students who had great experiences in many different areas, and so I learned a lot from my peers and I learned a lot putting on that event. And we raised \$10,000 this year.

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

I would say you have to be involved from the very beginning. I started here at IU very, very concerned about academics – probably too much – and didn't put myself out there too much to be involved in organizations, simply because I was just so concerned with academics – and thinking about the rigors of a program that is ranked No. 1, you can probably understand why I felt that way. But the more involved I got, the more I realized that obviously the more productive you are in your life outside of class, the more productive I think you are in class. And I think that that builds your network and helps you in the long run. And it's also just more enjoyable.

Tell me a little about the Nonprofit Service Corps and its objectives.

Nonprofit Service Corps is a really unique program across the country, one of very few of its kind. It's a merit aid award that is given to graduate students when they come into the program. It places students in what is essentially a graduate assistantship, but instead of working within the school, we place students in nonprofit organizations throughout the community. And I should say that Nonprofit Service Corps is one arm of Service Corps. The other arm is the Public Service Corps program, and those students are placed in fellowships in public entities such as the city government, county government, school corporations, and so forth. Service Corps offers students the opportunity to have professional experience while they're in graduate school, which is much desired, I think, when you come out – you want your résumé to be full during that time that you were, you know, active and participating professionally. And it offers students service and professional development. As well, the extra benefit is that there's an award; that the students have a stipend and fee remission that comes along with it. So it's a great, great program, and I think that it's probably one of those things that you could call symbiotic: it's beneficial for the community, for the university, and for students.

How did you find out about the Nonprofit Service Corps, and why did you decide to become involved?

Actually, I suppose this probably tells you the truth about why I chose to attend IU ... [laughter] ... back to that question. I actually got a call in the summer when I was wavering – I didn't know

if I was going to come to IU or not – I got a call from their graduate recruiter and he offered me a position in the Service Corps program. That was when I initially started researching it and realized how beneficial it was for a student like myself to be gaining this professional experience while in school and being able to give service to the community. I decided to become involved because of those benefits, but as well, it helped financially as an out-of-state student.

Tell me about a Service Corps event or program that you were involved in that you are particularly proud of.

I am simply honored to be a part of Service Corps as the whole. And I was particularly proud and honored to be chosen as a coordinator my second year. This past year, I suppose a particular event that I'm proud of is the fact that we used a lot of our professional development times to go out into the community and give extra service. Usually Service Corps does one service event per semester, but this year we did several more, simply because the opportunities presented themselves and the need was there in the community. For instance, in the fall the food bank was low on food, so we chose to go in and help them package some of their food and get it ready for moving it out into the community, and we felt like that freed up some time for administration to help collect more food at that time when there was a shortage. Another example: we worked at the Red Cross book fair this year – tons and tons of books for the Red Cross, and I know that they raised thousands and thousands of dollars from that event. So it feels so good to be a part of an organization that is doing this service for the community, and it was particularly an honor for me to coordinate those events this year.

What have your experiences been like interacting with nonprofit organizations in the community?

It's been a wonderful experience. I have been able to network with executive directors of nonprofit organizations such as the United Way – Barry Lessow is there – Toby Strout, Middleway House – these people are important community members, community leaders, and I felt honored to be able to interact with them on a level that I think is, you know, somewhat equal. I have also enjoyed learning about the nonprofit organizations in the community. I keep saying I've been honored to be the coordinator, and that's been particularly the case because I don't necessarily have a specialization in nonprofit organizations. There is a wonderful nonprofit management program at SPEA that is also ranked No. 1 in the country, and so the fact that that's not necessarily my specialization, I felt that I was honored to be chosen to coordinate that group. As far as the organizations in the community, they've been very accepting of me and they have always worked very hard to make Service Corps be the best that it can – and part of the difficulty in that is that students work in these organizations only nine hours a week – that's pretty much as much as you can expect from a graduate student, I think – and that's difficult for their supervisors in these nonprofit organizations to always have substantive work waiting for them, because they see them relatively a little amount of time during the week. And so I just appreciate the nonprofit organizations' efforts and the supervisors' efforts to make this program work and to get the most out of it.

What challenges have you faced within the Service Corps?

Probably typical HR issues. I coordinate these students, and that means basically on-the ground work, making sure that they're able, capable, to go to work every week and that they're doing their jobs well. These are graduate students with very, very busy lives, and sometimes, you know, they have personal concerns that really – it really pulls you in as a coordinator and you want to be involved, and at some point, you know, there's a place that I think you have to step back and not get too involved so that you can function well and keep, you know, that distance so you can organize things and find solutions well. And so it's hard not to get too involved in all the lives of the students that are involved. There are 30 graduate students in the program, just in the nonprofit program, and another 30 in the public corps, so it's quite a challenge to manage that many lives and to not care too much for that many lives, you know?

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

I think that my leadership skills have developed tremendously, and it's really hard to put it in terms for an interview. I think that in the area that I just talked about, HR, I didn't have a whole lot of experience managing that many people. That's been something that I've had to face a lot this year, and it's been interesting at times, but I've grown from every experience, no matter how great or how difficult it was. I think that I have become more sensitive to people, and I think that that's an important leadership skill. I think I've become more organized. I've learned important professional skills that I think I'll take with me the rest of my life. I have to say that a lot of that is in thanks to my direct supervisor, Jennifer Forney, the director of the Graduate Program Office, who has been a wonderful example for me of a leader. And so I appreciate that she's shared with me and taken opportunities to teach me to have better leadership skills.

What have you gained through your interactions with IU alumni?

I had a really unique opportunity to work with alumni through the Student Professional Enrichment Auction. This past year we decided that probably the first year professors put in a whole lot of money, spent a whole lot of money at the auction, and we really needed to broaden our audience, I guess, for this event. And so we marketed a lot more to alumni. I got a lot of help from the Alumni Association and from SPEA Alumni Association in particular, gathering all of the addresses and e-mail addresses for these people to get them involved, and it was amazing. The first e-mail we sent out about the event, inviting alumni to attend and inviting them to give of themselves if they could – for both donations to the auction or monetary donations – immediately our e-mail boxes were clogged with alumni offering up these different kinds of donations, in kind and monetary. And it was so amazing to see that because it really told me that the School of Public and Environmental Affairs has touched people's lives and changed their lives for the better, and so much so that they're willing to give of themselves. And IU, the whole IU community, has also done that, I think, and that's what makes people willing to give back once they're gone, I think.

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

I hope to get a Ph.D. and be able to be a mentor to people such as myself at some point in my life, and be able to continue research in environmental policy and natural resource management. IU has helped me prepare to meet those goals, I think, in a myriad of ways. Probably first and foremost, the School of Public and Environmental Affairs is a professional program, and I've learned to be, I think, a better professional from that program. Moreover, I've gained the hard skills, I think, that are necessary for my field. I had an English degree from Morehead State University as an undergraduate, and so to move into environmental policy and environmental science, one would think, is fairly difficult, but it was not a difficult transition into SPEA. There were always opportunities to get extra help from professors, and I appreciate that so much, and I think that that experience, I'll take that with me the rest of my life and realize that when I'm in need of help, I know I can get out there and find it. And I recognize also that when others are in need of help, it's great to give of yourself and give opportunities to others, I think, and that's what's been given to me here at SPEA and at IU.

What will you miss the most when you graduate?

I will miss the most when I move away from here – which will probably be the same time as I graduate – I will miss the relationships that I have built in this community. And what's wonderful about that is I think probably a lot of people would say the relationships they have built in the IU community alone – but the opportunities that IU, through the School of Public and Environmental Affairs and through the Service Corps program, have given to me, these opportunities have expanded my horizon beyond just simply being a graduate student stuck on a campus. I have been out in the community of Bloomington and in the community of Monroe County, and that has been probably the greatest experience of my life. Building relationships with important community leaders and learning from them and being able to observe them – those experiences I will miss the most and those relationships I will miss the most.

We've been talking with Sarah Mincey of the SPEA Nonprofit Service Corps.

[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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