

Student Stories Project: Pat Shifley

Audio version available at: <http://www.alumni.indiana.edu/profiles/students/shifley.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 at Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne speaking with Pat Shifley of the Student Activities Board.

SHIFELY: My name is Pat Snyder Shifley. I’m from Fort Wayne, Indiana, I’m a senior, and my major is secondary education with an emphasis on English – I’ll be middle-school-endorsed for English and social studies. My interests – well, my kids would be my first interest. I just like to be spending time with the people that I love. I love sports, I love to watch sports. I especially love college sports of any kind, it really doesn’t matter.

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

I think probably the most enjoyable experience being here is just being a part of the group that I’m involved with, which is the Student Activities Board. It has been such an incredible privilege and honor to bring some of the speakers and people that we’ve brought here. You know, something might not appeal to you or to me, but it would appeal to somebody else, and it’s just been really nice – that students that we haven’t seen at other events come to an event and thank us afterwards – I mean, that has just been really the coolest, coolest experience to think that you had a part in that.

What advice would you give to incoming freshmen and other nontraditional students just starting out at IPFW?

The biggest part for me is I took a class when I came here, when I first came back, because I was nontraditional and it had been so long since I'd been in school. I took this – it was like an IDIS class. I know a lot of the athletes are required to take it, but it just kind of is that crossover class between high school and college, or for me, just a bridge because it had been a long time. And so it kind of acclimated you to where to find the different things on campus; we had small papers we had to write – but it was just like short-term, kind of get your confidence booster back up, so that was really good for me.

The other thing that I found to be probably the most helpful is the tutoring center, and it's free – we pay for it out of our student fees. You know, I have a daughter who just graduated from college, and she never went to a tutoring center down on her campus once, but for me, it was free, it comes out of my fees, and I went twice a week religiously to help me pass my math. It had been so long since I'd had math. So for me, rather than waiting until I failed, it was just a springboard to help me pass and succeed at a class that I knew I would have struggled with otherwise.

How have your leadership skills developed over the course of your participation in the community and with IPFW?

So, being that I'm nontraditional, I've been out of high school about 30 years, and in high school I was in student government, I was a student class officer, yearbook editor, I was all those things in high school, so I've always kind of been drawn to being a part of things. I've never considered myself ever to be a leader per se, I've always considered myself to be a follower or a doer, but since being here and especially this past year, I took on a major leadership role in being the Student Activities Board president. And it was kind of by default that I got it. Somebody was elected to the position and couldn't fulfill the term – they were only in office a few weeks – and I was on the board and was picked to take over. So it wasn't something I actively sought, but in the long run ended up being the biggest blessing that I've had in a really long time. You can't just sit back and wait. Everybody's looking to you for your opinion and for your advice and for ideas, and from that comes other people's ideas that kind of bounce off each other, but to be a leader – I mean, here I am at 49 years old and finally able to realize that it's not a bad thing to step up and say "This is what my opinion is." I've always wanted to be part of the planning and the doing, but I always was reluctant to be the one to be, "Well, this is what I think we should do." And that's not a bad thing to be, and I realize that – I mean, it's only taken me how long in my life to realize that? – but it's nice now to finally be able to say, "You know what, this is what I think and this is why I think it, and you don't have to take it, and you can do with it what you want." And out of that might not be what the end result is, but out of that comes for other people who were like previous me, waiting till somebody else gave their opinion to say, "Well, I like that, but could we add this to it?" And so I now realize that it takes both to make anything work.

What challenges have you faced during your time as a student at IPFW?

I think the biggest challenge on any campus, but probably especially here because it seems to be more commuterish, is just feeling like it's a campus, to feel like you're involved. I went to college years ago and didn't finish, but because you live there, everything is focused there. People are outside playing football, and people are – I mean, that's where they live, that's where they stay. Well, here, I mean, spring break when I was on campus, it's a ghost town. Well, here, granted, no one's around here as well, but here people are working jobs. They're not in Florida and they're not in Cancun. They work incredibly, incredibly hard. So I think that's been the hardest thing, is to just feel a sense of community at certain things. And it's there, but you have to actively – It's like anything. I mean, the university reaches out as far as they can, but you have to reach the rest of the way in order to be able to participate. And they've got, you know, Omnibus [lecture] series at night, and they do things at night. And there again, back to the program that I did, Student Activities Board, we worked really hard this year to do activities at nontraditional times as well. We did the lunchtimes when people were here, but we tried in the evenings, and we did some weekend things, and we did programs that involved your families, which hopefully then makes people have more of a sense that it's their college as well, that it's their community. So that's probably been the biggest challenge – is me feeling a part, and then once I became a part, making other people feel a part of the university.

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

I was an Ambassador here on campus, which is a student ambassador. You apply, you know, you have to have a certain grade point average, you have to have a 3.0 or above. Last year I don't know how many hundreds applied, and 12 are chosen. So you are an ambassador for the university as far as, when the Omnibus series comes, when we go to a Board of Trustees meeting – each one of us takes a turn going to the Board of Trustees meetings – we serve at the chancellor's home when he has an event, as far as greeting people – and it was a very, I mean, you're in with the cream of the crop of the university, so they say, and they did a really phenomenal job of training us. Just how to deal with the media, and how to – I mean, we had etiquette classes. They really kicked you up to the next notch as to what was expected of you as far as to be a representative of the university, and it was a fun experience. It was really good. I was glad I did it.

I belong to an organization – well, I belong to two honoraries, and the one is a little more active than the other: Educators For Excellence, which is people that want to be teachers, and so they have a series of speakers that come in that talk to us about preparing our portfolios or, you know, people that are currently student teaching, kind of to help alleviate the fears of those of us who are going to be student teaching, kind of ask questions and answer things; they bring principals in so we can ask of them what they're looking for in teachers – so I belong to that. And then Omicron Psi is an honor society for nontraditional students and traditionally they haven't done much of anything, but now this year they were very adventuresome in what they did, and they put on a really big event. So while I didn't actively participate in it, so I shouldn't even be mentioning it, but I'm really proud of the group that they stepped it up a notch, and that's just it: it takes each little group stepping up a little bit more. I mean, we're never going to be IU Bloomington, and we're not going to be Purdue–West Lafayette, but we are IPFW, and that's something to be proud of. We need to make our own groups and our own clubs and our own traditions, and slowly but surely we're getting there.

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

Well, for one, I would never have imagined, you know, a few years ago that I was going to be back at school. I always thought I'd finish. You know, I ended up – in a short period of time I lost three people that were incredibly close to me: my dad, and my grandma who had lived with me – I took care of her for 10 years, and then a niece got killed two weeks after that. In addition to that, I lost the job I had. So in 70 days' time, my world was, like, turned upside down. So I had trained to be a secretary when I was in high school – they had these classes within the high school that, you know, like, I don't know what they call those – but, you know, you're trained in the outside world kind of thing. People don't hire secretaries anymore. So when I lost my job, I wasn't trained to do anything, and I didn't have enough college to do anything. You know, when you get to thinking, “Man, I'm 46 years old, by the time I'm finished I'm going to be 50,” and, you know, you kind of start reeling around all that stuff. Well, I'm volunteering at the kids' high school, and some woman had come and talked to somebody here at IPFW at the [Center for Women and Returning Adults], and she said, “You know, I think I'm going to go back and start taking classes,” and it was like that lit a spark in me, and I thought, “You know, I've always wanted to do that.” And through that conversation, I made an appointment with that person and came back. But had it not been for all of the bad things, I wouldn't have come back.

I was going to be 50 either way, you know? If I didn't come back to school or I did come back to school, I'm going to be 50. And maybe I'll get a job teaching, maybe I won't, but I'll have a piece of paper that tells everybody that I'm as smart as I knew I was four years ago, but at least now I'll have a piece of paper to show that I am. And I don't care in what capacity it is, I don't care if I get a teaching job, I don't care if I get hired by the university – I'd love to work for IPFW – I want to work with students in some capacity. I love kids. I love them in every shape, size, color – I love kids. I could work with preschool kids, elementary kids – I love kids. So I don't care what I'm doing when I finish, I want to work with kids. And I especially want kids like my son, who is a royal pain – I want them all to see that if I could go back at 46 and really achieve a dream – because I've always wanted to have my college diploma and always felt bad about myself because I didn't have it, I always felt like I'd failed myself for not doing it – so if I can go back and do it, and, you know, maintain a certain grade point average and still be involved in my community and the university and take care of a husband and my own family, then they certainly can come back and take classes. So, you know, hopefully it's – to never give up on a dream, that it's never too late for your dreams to come true. You know, sometimes you've got to give up something in order to get something, and so all those things are kind of where I'm at right now.

What will you miss the most when you graduate?

You know, I should say the classes. But, I mean, I will probably always take classes the rest of my life. But I think 90 percent of the people, if you ask them about their college, they might have a professor here or there – they might have a class here or there that they randomly talk about – but what they're going to talk about is people and the people that meant something to them – which, I guess that includes professors – but the people that I have met through the organizations

that I've belonged to are – if I got nothing else, if I didn't get a diploma, I would be okay, just with the people that I've experienced and met. I've met so many people that have touched my life in – I'm going to start crying – in so many ways. They just... my gosh. Okay, I'm going to tell you a story which is probably off track. Last year I had to go to a leadership conference. We went to Washington, D.C., we did the whole conference, and in the evening they were going to go out one night and offered that I could come with them. And I'm like, "That's just what you want, for your mom to come with you" – and they're like, "No, we really want you to come!" So at the end of it all, I said, you know, about the "mom," and one said to me, "I don't think of you as anything other than Pat." And to me, that was, like, the nicest compliment. It wasn't like, "Well, you're my mom," or "You are a mom," they thought of me as being another student. And so, that was to me like the icing on the cake. Two weeks ago or whenever when my position ended and somebody else took it over, they made me an incredible videotape of the year and pictures of me with them and all of them. And the group last year at its peak had about six members – it just was a really kind of flailing year – and when I left this year we had 20-some members that they'll start off with next year – all very strong members, all showing up to everything. And they range in age from somebody just graduating from high school to somebody that's older than me, and many ages in between, and I'm very proud of that. And I'm going to miss the interaction with all of them more than anything. They make me laugh, they make me think, they just made me a better person. I'm going to miss that.

We've been talking with Pat Shifley of IPFW's Student Activities Board.

[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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