

Student Stories Project: Leila Vaziri

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

[IU fight song]

Welcome to the Indiana University Student Stories Project, a production of the IU Alumni Association. I am 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 Leila Vaziri from the IU women's swim team.

VAZIRI: I am a senior majoring in communication and culture with a minor in business. I am from Coral Springs, Florida. I am a graduating senior backstroker/freestyler on the swim team. My interests are traveling, reading, exercise, beach, outdoor activities, outdoor sports.

Why did you choose to attend IU?

Being from south Florida, when my senior year of high school came around and I was getting recruited out of high school for sports, I knew I wanted to try and expand myself and go outside of Florida, so I looked at schools all around the whole country and took recruiting trips to ACC schools, SCC schools, pretty much everywhere. And then I was recruited to IU and wasn't sure exactly where Indiana was or Bloomington. I knew it was in the Midwest. I took a recruiting trip out here because I really liked the coach – at that time it was Dorsey Tierney – and came to Bloomington and I loved the team and I loved Bloomington and, like, immediately knew that I wanted to go to a Big Ten school and IU.

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

I've really enjoyed taking in, like, Bloomington as a town. I think I've tried my best to not just be an athlete in college. I've really tried to, like, be a student and get a taste of Bloomington and

get into academics – I did not want to just be, like, a college jock. So one of my most memorable things is every year in Bloomington they have the Lotus Festival, a music and arts festival. I have gone every year and kind of walked around and it was fun. And then this year we went and we saw some really, like, emerging artists or something that I think really you would only see in a college town, and I loved that and it was so much fun. We saw this one group called Balkan Beat Box and they were so cool and I don't know. It just was really memorable.

What advice would you give to incoming freshmen or other students just starting out at IU?

I would say my freshman year was difficult. It was a difficult adjustment. I think when you're coming from high school to college, like, you anticipate that there will be a lot of change, but it was more than I expected. I would say what helped me through my freshman year was I stayed in touch with my family and my friends at home a lot when I would get homesick. Or, for me coming my freshman year, the weather was a real shock to me – when the winter came and it was so long and I was like, oh my gosh. I didn't realize that winter was six months long. I thought it was, like, two. But for me I would say, advice to give to incoming freshmen, I'd say my family, keeping in touch with them and my friends from home as much as I could helped me really get through, like, the difficulty of being homesick and everything.

Why did you decide to become a member of the women's swim team?

Swimming is what even brought me to IU initially, but everything else I've loved. I've loved communication and culture school, I've loved academics, I've loved Bloomington. So I was totally sold on the whole IU. But what initially brought me here was the women's swim team.

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

I'd say one of my highlights of my IU swimming career was this year we won Big Tens. And all four years we came close and we really – in college sports, winning a conference is, like, *everything*. NCAAs is incredible, but really, schools that win that, it's like an Auburn or a Georgia. But for IU to win Big Tens, which is really a difficult conference and really strong in swimming, it was a really big, strong win for us this year that we won.

How have your leadership skills developed over the course of your participation on the swim team?

Being on the swim team in college is this social circle that you're able to learn leadership skills and teamwork skills. I mean, every day we're together, and it's really special sharing – sharing with so many girls your age and your friends, like, a common goal and a common dream and desire to do well and to be a good athlete. Leadership skills, for sure, I've developed, and I think maybe even freshman year. Even as a freshman you learn them. I think that's a great thing about being on a swim team, it's not even class – even though this year as a senior I've felt even more being able to step up and, like, lead freshmen, but everybody contributes, even freshmen.

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

I only have immediate goals at the moment. I graduate in a week and a half. So my immediate goals: I'm going back to Florida, back to my hometown, and I will train for one year for the Olympic trials at the end of next summer – next July of '08. This is the focus for me for the next year. After that, I am unsure, but graduating in communication and culture I really feel like I got such a good education. I loved communication and culture and I love my education at IU. I think it's just helped me in so many ways. I've just, as a person, educationally, connection-wise – IU has been wonderful.

What will you miss the most when you graduate?

I will miss the most ... my team. Being an athlete in college just really takes up your whole life, your whole time, and that's awesome. It's, like, a great thing, you sign on and you come here and you have friends immediately, and you have this social circle immediately. So I'm going to be graduating and going back home and I won't have that. I'll be going back to my club team, which is different. They're younger kids and a few older ones, but it's definitely not the same as a tight-knit girls' college team, and I definitely will miss the girls the most.

We've been talking with Leila Vaziri from the IU women's swim team.

[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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