

Student Stories Project: Aaron Williamson

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

“One of the members of the club brought the Mad Money show to campus. Now, that was a big step for both the school and the club.”

– to the hard work –

“Graduate school takes up more time and energy than you can anticipate.”

– to the memories that will last a lifetime.

“I traveled to India in the fall of 2006 with 60 students from the Kelley School of Business.”

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 Aaron Williamson of the Student Government Association.

WILLIAMSON: Hi, my name is Aaron Williamson. I'm a senior as of the end of last semester. I'm majoring in public and environmental affairs with a concentration in legal studies. Born and raised in Fort Wayne. I'm currently the student body president of the Indiana-Purdue Student Government Association here at IPFW. And my interests vary – I'm a member of various organizations on campus which I'll go into a little bit later, and that's kind of reflective of my interests.

Why did you choose to attend IPFW?

I'm actually a transfer student from Ivy Tech. I got a paralegal studies associate degree there, came over, and it just fit perfectly into my ambition of being a lawyer, having a legal studies program here. In addition, the cost of tuition and then just the locale were ideal.

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

There's actually a couple, but I'll go into the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity. Last year I attended it in Chicago. This trip is one of many that IPFW sponsors and provides students

the opportunity to get that life experience, that real-world experience, and also serves as a résumé-enhancer. That conference provided an opportunity to speak with professors across the nation about social justice issues. The topic that year was white privilege and white group identity. Not only did I get to interact with various professors throughout the nation, but also students. We had many late nights sitting up and having great discussions.

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

The advice I'd give is: kind of find out what your workload will look like. And then if you do have free time, really get involved. The involvement just builds bonds on campus; it makes sure that you have a connection and investment in your university; and the experiences you'll gain throughout the time you're on campus are phenomenal.

Tell me a little about the Student Government Association at IPFW.

This would go to another conference I attended, actually: the American Student Government Association. That's with all the different student governments across the nation that are members of ASGA or are interested in being members. I found at that conference that IPFW is blessed in reference to the amount of money that we actually allocate, and then also the impact that we have on our campus. As I mentioned earlier, the allocations that IPSGA makes – we have about a million-dollar budget – to be exact, we have \$1,035,111.37. I know this because I was last year's student body comptroller, which is kind of the finance guy. It's an excellent opportunity to impact the different programs and services we have on campus. In addition to that, just the student feedback we have – every university committee on campus that has student affairs impact, we have student representation on. And this year as student body president, I'll actually be the person appointing the student representation to that. The opportunity to impact your campus life, and then also to develop the programming that will be most beneficial to you after you leave the campus, is completely within the hands of IPSGA, i.e., the student body.

How did you find out about the Student Government Association, and why did you decide to become a member?

They have a thing called Student Organization Fair day at the beginning of the year when students come on campus. I was a little disgruntled, actually – when I came in, I was like, “Why aren't student organizations recruiting me?” you know? Then I see this organization fair day, and I'm like, “Yes!” I had the great fortune of meeting the vice president of student government at the time, Nate Hubley, and he took me under his wing – he showed me all the different benefits, all the different opportunities you have as an IPSGA member. And I just got involved from that point.

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

Me, I love academics. But I know a lot of students don't, so I'll kind of just digress on that and go to the social aspect, which students love on campus. I mean, it's great, because it provides a

break and just gives you that balance that you need. So with that in mind: the Spring Fling. It's a week-long event, and we actually have carnival games, we have free food, we have inflatables for students to do wrestling, boxing – I mean, it was an amazing experience because students really – you could see the college campus experience here at IPFW during that time.

What challenges have you faced during your participation in the Student Government Association?

Again, me being of a legal background, I'm used to seeing things clearly articulated within documents, procedures, and policies. That's not always been the case here, simply because students' government role has expanded so much that we have to kind of blaze new trails, so to speak – create new policies and procedures for the extra roles we've taken on. Though that's been somewhat frustrating, it's also been a great benefit, because I can put on my résumé that I've developed policy and procedure. And also, now that we've expanded our role, we have that foundation in the documents supporting that expansion.

How have your leadership skills developed over the course of your participation in the Student Government Association?

I've always been fairly outgoing, but being put in the position of first, comptroller, the previous year, and then student body president this year, I think they've grown a lot. One, because of the different training they provide. We have SOLD, Student Organization Leadership Development, and they provide two workshops a year for student leaders. Also just the training I've received as a member of IPSGA. I feel fairly confident in saying that I am able to step into any situation and take a leadership role.

What organizations are you a part of here at IPFW?

That would be a long list, actually. In addition to IPSGA, I'm also the founding president and current vice president of America's Renaissance. That's the departmental student organization of the School of Public and Environmental Affairs – that's my major, and I get to chair their departmental organization, which is awesome. I am a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, and what they look at is just looking at the ethics and professionalism within fundraising and the philanthropy world. I am a member of the Black Collegian Caucus. I am a member of Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana – that's actually an outside group, but we look to have a lot of collaborative efforts within this year on campus. I was a former member of the Ambassador program – that's an elite group of students working with the chancellor for hosting events and then just kind of supporting IPFW agendas.

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

One of my main interests would be social justice, and that's more or less just kind of reviewing, looking at policy decisions and how they may have a negative impact on certain minority groups, and then working to correct those policy issues. I think IPFW has really helped me in the way of the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity, also with the Affirmative Action Council, the

diversity council, and just their focus on diversity on campus. Seeing how it's actually implemented in an institutional setting really shows that, one, it can be achieved; and two, you get to kind of reflect on their policy decisions and see the benefits and the drawbacks and then modify those for your own efforts.

What will you miss the most when you graduate?

Being a student. [laughter] Having to go out into the real world, get a job, do the 40 hours a week, if not more – most likely 60 hours a week – I will miss the free time that I got to focus on and dedicate myself to studies.

We've been talking with Aaron Williamson of IPFW's Student Government Association.

[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.

[IU fight song]