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### The Stories We Carry

Everyone has a story to tell, whether it is your life story, love story or college story. The most common story among students is their college story. After I conducted five interviews I found out that people had completely different perceptions of college before coming to the University of Illinois in particular. Their perceptions were created not by an actual institution but by the “outside” world. The “outside” world meaning their parents, friends, environment, books and movies. Before even coming here students had to picture their future student life somehow. They could not get a feel of what it really is to be a college student, so the perceptions of what they should expect once they come to the University of Illinois were influenced by others. Every person has a completely different story to tell and everyone that I had interviewed had different thoughts and expectations before they even got here.

“What does attending college going to give me?” Everyone seems to ask themselves as they are deciding to apply. There are so many thoughts and doubts about how we should lead our life after high school. Everybody has to choose whether to go to college or get a full time job right after high school. It is all up to the person, what they will choose to do with their lives. Then of course, there is a financial problem coming into play and then you question yourself, “Is it really worth it?” Attending college is not a cheap choice to make because you are faced with all the loans you have to pay off after college, and for many people that is a factor of choosing not to go to college after all. Some people think that a high school diploma will get them everywhere. Often hoping skills and experience will get them the income they want. People who

actually decide to go to college feel very different about this fact. To them knowledge and education means a big deal and that's why they are willing to pay for it and get high paying jobs with their degree afterwards. Many students choose to pursue their graduate degree after they attain their bachelor degree. Choices are made for various reasons and I am not the one to blame or favor them. I am investigating stories of people who actually made their choice to attend the University of Illinois.

All five people that I interviewed as well as myself before coming to UIUC went to orientation which is mandatory. When I came here for the first time I was overwhelmed with the size of the campus and how long it took to find a building. The same way I am sure most of students felt, however after a week or so we learned how to navigate the campus and now I have to admit I manage to get around campus perfectly. It is funny when I asked what were your first impressions of UIUC campus, everybody said they were overwhelmed by its humongous size and the atmosphere it created. The Buildings and main quad made a big impression not only on me but on my college mates as well. Some of the students I interviewed also noted that they made their decision about coming here after they visited UIUC campus, based on what they saw. "I think the atmosphere these buildings created was a big factor in my decision to attend the University of Illinois" Lizzie confessed. Tour guides tell students different stories about every building they pass by, and explain what type of classes they would be taking in those buildings. Tour guide's stories are also a big influence on students when they are making their final decisions. Therefore, everything that catches the eye of a prospective student on the day of orientation has an essential meaning to their choice of school.

Of course one has a sense of what this university should portray before even coming to UIUC. First of all, University of Illinois is a top public university in America with the best

programs in Engineering, Accounting, one of the most competitive colleges of Business. One of the most important benefits is also the affordable cost of a high quality education, which was one of the main reasons of attending this university for majority of students.”It was the best school I could afford. I did not feel like I had to sacrifice, however. I think this is a great institution,” Dave said. A Number of my friends also wanted to achieve something in their lives and in their opinion attending a university is one of the goals for every educated individual. Plenty of students are the first generation to even attend college and their parents who did not get a chance to attend a secondary institution encourage their children to do so. Many of my friends, being a student in college already went beyond the level of education that their parents achieved. Mike, one of the freshmen here at UIUC, whom I interviewed said that he never seen himself doing anything else after high school but attending college, because that is what his parents expected him to do. That was the main reason they brought him to United States, so he is able to get high quality education and achieve beyond his ability.

Fortunately, this is the story of most immigrants, especially teens from Europe who came to United States with the main goal to get American secondary education. Simply because American diplomas and degrees are recognized anywhere in the world. Although Europe might be a better place to live, America is surely a better place to get an education and work getting a substantial wage for your achievements. In Eastern Europe, you might be a professional in your industry with a Ph.D, and then work as a janitor because there is no better paying jobs. However, this will not happen in the United States. Lizzie stated that she loves the architecture and old fashioned buildings in Urbana-Champaign because that reminds her of Europe and her homeland country, Poland. This European style campus made her decide that UIUC is where she wants to live and study for the next four years.

A similar story happened to me. When I came here, a little “student town” and campus itself reminded me of this European style town which made me nostalgic for my own home country, Ukraine.

Many students came to UIUC because their parents went here and some came here because their parents expect them to attend secondary institution just as they did. For example, after I interviewed five of my friends only two of them said that their parents attended college. That struck me, because naturally parents who go to college they want their kids to follow their foot steps and if some family members did not get that opportunity they try to make it happen for their off spring.

My mom always said that I should be better off in life, achieve more, travel more, do more things then she did when she was my age. When she was my age she got married and a year later had me. She finished her Musical Conservatory and got her Master’s, but by that time she had two kids. I always admired her for that, which is why I think of her as my role model, and an example of what I can achieve in life. Regardless, she was very strong to have a family while managing to finish her secondary education. My whole family is college educated and I am very proud of that fact. Although that might be a reason and motivation to attend college for some students, for me not going to college is something I would never even think about. It is not because “my parents went and I am expected to do the same” kind of policy, it is more of the value I put to my education. “I believe that a college education is essential in our society to sustain a level of income that would satisfy my desire for material things,” Bill noted. On this thought I agreed with Bill, a sophomore in Political Science and Economics when he said that getting a secondary education is essential in our type of society. Also it is priceless because no one can buy nor take away the knowledge you gain from education. Of course it is crucial to get

a degree to sustain a level of income that is satisfactory for a person to survive, which is the whole point of getting a higher education. For some people, it is not required to go to college in order to earn sufficient amount of money but that is when secondary education becomes a goal in one's life. Bill as well as many other students grow to appreciate the liberal arts education they are getting. "The experience has been truly eye-opening," Bill commented.

Five people that I interviewed chose to attend UIUC because the university offers outstanding programs for nearly every possible major. Angela, a freshman in secondary education, came to UIUC because they offered a really good education program and she always dreamed of becoming a teacher. Mike, a freshman in Mechanical Engineering, chose UIUC because college of Engineering is one of the top colleges in USA. Jenifer chose to attend UIUC because she felt that this school would better prepare her for her further studies. She is a freshman in biology and she decided to attend UIUC because she values the quality of education that this university offers. The quality is very high and she is convinced that after devoting four years to the UIUC it will benefit her when she continues her education in medical school. I can name many examples, but the conclusion is identical. Students value their education very highly and they choose their secondary institution according to their expectations.

Oddly, Angela was the only freshman among the students I interviewed that heard stories about college from their siblings. Her older sister went to UIC so Angela had a chance to hear real college stories. Of course her sister did not experience the whole college experience because she was living at home while attending UIC. Nonetheless, she told Angela that college is a very diverse environment. She warned her that she will meet many people from various backgrounds and she will make new friendships that could last a lifetime. She told Angela a story about this girl she met in one of her classes and then they figured out that they knew each other since they

went to middle school together but they lost touch. Angela's sister said that the world is a very small place indeed.

Students that I interviewed also were aware of a fact that movies they saw about college were unrealistic. They knew that movies were intentionally made full of parties and fun so they are interesting. Therefore, all you can expect is a lot of partying taking place on campus, along with very little learning taking place. They knew that in college you have to study way harder than in high school and you have to put in a lot more effort into your work to get a sufficient result.

College is the place which suppose to challenge young minds of students rather than being a place of non-stop partying. Although college experience might be portrayed as all about partying and having fun, it is also a place where a great amount of learning and gaining academic experience takes place.