“The Orange & Blue Stories We Carry”

Stories have been said to shape our perceptions of the University of Illinois. Not only have the stories affected us while we have been apart of the campus community, but before we came and will continue even after we leave. It is also significant that many of our views about college do not always stem from the university in question, but also are shaped by external forces as well. Those forces could be family members, friends, movies, and even literature. For these reasons this paper will show how stories from students being interviewed at the University of Illinois have shaped their view of college, and particularly the University of Illinois.

Thinking back to the extent in which Calvin Trillin’s sense of Yale was shaped by his father’s desires that were formed from reading a work of literature entitled, “Stover at Yale,” an interview that was held with a peer stands out. As I interviewed this peer she seemed very unsure about her choice to attend the University of Illinois. She honestly admitted that because her mother attended the University of Illinois also, she persisted that her daughter does so as well. The mother was said to “hype” up the university and insist that it was very prestigious. It is ironic how the mother’s tactic to influence her daughter’s decision by bragging on the prominence of the university seemed to further dissuade her to attend. The daughter instead tried to branch out on her own to do further research. She increased her knowledge on the University of Illinois by having a tour,
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talking to students on campus already, and visiting the website; where she later found herself ready to become a part of the “Illini.”

The same interviewee as above confessed that she was indeed nervous about attending the U of I. When asked why she was nervous she stated, “I heard snooty people go here.” She also mentioned that the University of Illinois was rumored to be a Research Institute, and while that sounds very interesting it was frightening to an incoming freshman that had no idea what that consisted of. Whether it was the “research institute” aspect that sold her, or the chance to attend this campus was just undeniable, whichever reason, the interviewee was later accepted into the U of I; she now resides here, expecting great things and is currently doing exceptional.

As a “minority,” the student felt that her experience on campus might differ greatly than another student. She supports this statement by describing a memory that stands out in her mind from attending the U of I thus far. The memory occurred her freshman year during an African American Leadership Conference at Rust College in Mississippi. This conference allowed her an opportunity to not only meet some prospective students of color, but also a chance to get to know them in a way that changed her whole experience at the University of Illinois for the better. A few of the peers on the trip are now some of her closest friends on campus. She connected with them in a way that allowed her to realize that she was not alone on a campus that is predominately white. Among other connections the interviewee shared a common goal with the peers she met, to attain a degree to later influence society in a positive manner, by giving back to their community and advancing in their desired study of work.
While literature like “Stover at Yale,” has shown to be an influence, movies also have an affect too. The consistent influence that was seen in the interviews was for social rather than the educational side of college. Some of the movies that were said to stand out was, “Animal House,” “How High,” “School Dayz,” and even “Revenge of the Nerds.” All interviewees agreed that movies depicted college as an everlasting party for the most part. One could attest to this notion because in each movie mentioned above the social side of college like sex, drugs, sororities/fraternities, and just plain partying is celebrated, rather than students taking courses to ultimately achieve a degree. An only exception to this notion might be the movie “School Dayz,” because the students in this movie become socially conscience in a different manner. This movie identifies the conflict between the campus and those of the town where the university resides, and allows viewers to openly see both sides. Because when being on campus at your own university, one may not be able to be neutral but rather take the side of their peers. It was interesting to see what events made an impact on my peers’ college experience at the U of I.

Truthfully everybody’s memories of an event on campus were not as positive. An interviewee revealed his first experience in a Rhetoric course in our very own English building. It occurred while the teacher’s assistant persisted that he was in the wrong class, he could not understand why she would presume so before checking her roster. It was not until he looked around the room and saw for himself how he was the only minority present, and his presumption was finalized. He had only come to the U of I because it was closer to home, so “in case anything happened,” as his parents put it he would be close to home. Growing up he had his heart set on attending a Historically Black
College/University. Yet he settled on attending a Big Ten School primarily for their respect of having one of the greatest Engineering programs. The decision not being totally his choice, it is clear that his parents had an influence.

Neither his mother nor father attended college, as a matter of fact they both have high school diplomas, but that did not stop them from being pro-education. They had explained to him as he grew up if the situation had been different they both would have gone to college, so higher education was a must for him. His father choosing to serve his country, while his mother had to help maintain the family by working as the oldest of thirteen children, neither of them really had an opportunity to attend college. Their son not having to worry about issues like theirs allowed him a shot at opportunities they did not have, college being the primary aspiration. It seemed in houses where the parents failed to attend college was where the students seemed to be set on attaining their degrees.

One of the interviewees explicitly had a significant case. While her mother had encouraged her for years to exceed in her studies, the tables were beginning to turn. The interviewee is a current graduating senior of the University of Illinois, and although she had earned her degree she made a conscious decision to continue higher education and attend to Graduate School. It seems that her mother had been influenced by her daughter this time. The interviewer’s mother chose to go back to school and finish college. Although, it had taken the student years of coaxing her mother that it was never too late nor was she to old to pursue a college degree before she finally decided to enroll in
college. So as this story depicts, parents are not the only influence when it comes to being educating.

While some students had not always wanted to go to the University of Illinois, they found a part of the University that fulfilled them personally. Since most of the interviewees were first generation students, and even the female with the mother that also attended the U of I, each case was similar. Each student had to get over their presumptions of what they expected college to be from their families, literature, and even movies and work with what college dealt them; which could have ranged from protests, conferences, good/bad grades, and even culture shocks. Despite their circumstances it seems the interviewees used what was meant for their bad for their good.

The decision to attend this school in general was a preparation in itself for the interviewees’ future. In becoming students here they learned that life does not always go as planned, and often times you have to make they do with what you have. Just as many of my interviewees mentioned, surprisingly enough they are not just here for themselves; whether it is for their parents, children, or even an entire community they have to do the best that they can possibly do here in college. Because so many people are expecting them to do well, but more importantly each person was destined for success and while they may not have attained all that they set out to, one has to admit they are well on their way just from attending our own prestigious University of Illinois.