



Hunter Ridley

High school: Sacred Heart-Griffin

Hometown: Springfield, Ill.

Majors: Geography, environmental studies

Activities: Geography Club, Upper Mississippi Center, Phi Beta Kappa

Internships: Summer 2018 National Science Foundation Research for Undergraduates Experience at SIUE; summer 2020 natural resources intern for the City of Davenport, Iowa

Post-grad plans: I won the 2019 Davies-Jackson Scholarship from the Council of Independent Colleges to study abroad at St. John's College at Cambridge University for two years to obtain my master's in geography.

“Hunter is one of those truly rare people who understands that the life she wants for herself is out there for her. She knows that in order to live that life fully, you need to approach each day with measures of courage, compassion, fearlessness and enthusiasm. I'm lucky that I've been able to have advised her and to have worked closely with her on several research projects, including her rigorous Senior Inquiry. As she heads off to Cambridge for graduate work, I hope she knows that she did college absolutely right, and I can give her my biggest compliment—I'm lucky to know her.”
—Dr. Matt Fockler, associate professor, geography and environmental studies

MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2020

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

Why Augustana?

I applied to three small, liberal arts colleges. I went to a small high school with small classes, where I knew almost everyone in my grade, and the teachers cared about students as individuals. Wherever I went to college, I wanted to have the same kind of experience. I ultimately chose Augustana because it was the campus on which I felt most at home, most welcomed and most encouraged to succeed—even after just one visit.

Are you where you thought you'd be when you first came to campus?

No way! Being a first-generation college student, I had no idea what college would be like, I had no expectations or preconceived notions. I never felt like I had to fit into a certain mold to be successful at Augie. Above all, I am vastly more confident in my academic and personal abilities than I ever thought I would be. A success I owe to a lot of hard work, leaps of faith, encouragement and guidance from professors, and support of my peers and senior cohort.

Who helped you get to where you are now?

Augustana's outstanding professors! I have never looked up to and admired so many people as I do now, knowing my departmental professors. They have truly been my greatest role models and support throughout my college career.

They were always a friendly face in the mornings; they cared about me as an individual; and they encouraged me to challenge myself and prove to myself that I was capable academically and personally of far more than I ever dreamed I'd be. I owe so much of my wisdom and confidence to them. I was a timid and confused underclassman (as most everyone is when they begin college), and the opportunities that professors offered to me early on—like helping with their research projects—made me feel trusted and capable.

Things only got better from there! Slowly I got to know more and more of my professors, worked with them more often, grew closer to other students in my majors, and my college experience really morphed into what now feels like a great big family.

Peak experience?

There are so many to choose from, but I think my peak experience would be the yearlong process of completing my Senior Inquiry. From ideas on a notecard; to a big sheet of paper outlining my project; to the many trials, errors and successes of fieldwork; to the countless hours of typing in the lab; to the completed nearly 50-page research essay written last fall—I wouldn't trade a thing for the time spent on my project and the abundance of personal lessons and skills it taught me.

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What surprised you?

One thing that surprised me most about Augie was how much like home school really feels like at the end of four years. I had no idea I would come to love Augustana and the Quad-Cities community so much. Each memory I have here has shaped the person I am today, and I am ever grateful to be privileged enough to belong to and be part of Augustana's history.

How did you use Augie Choice?

I used Augie Choice to study abroad in Auckland, New Zealand, where I completed a three-month internship at the Auckland City Hospital, working under its sustainability coordinator. I made lifelong friends and gained valuable real-world experience and knowledge about a growing industry.

What will you miss the most?

The hum of campus. Especially in the new COVID-19 world we're living in, now more than ever, I am missing the passing of friendly faces, office hours with professors, lectures in my favorite campus buildings, late nights writing papers, laughing in the Brew with friends and buying coffee from my favorite baristas, walking through the slough when it's lush and green in the fall and spring, checking out books from the library, and living within walking distance of some of my best friends.

Advice for the Class of 2024?

Build yourself into the person you have always wanted to be. It will be scary; it will be tough. You'll fail at times, but you will also succeed, and there will always be someone from Augie—be it a professor or a student—to support you when you need it and congratulate you when you grow.