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EE 491 Cumulative Reflection

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Failure is Good

A Reflection on My Time at Iowa State

My mom used to be a professional chef, and every space inch of our home's kitchen was packed with cookbooks passed down through generations, recipe cards nearly disintegrating from years of use, and two particularly well-loved books written by the legendary Julia Child. When I started learning, my mom started me on recipes from Child's 1989 classic *How to Cook* and her 1996 *Baking with Julia*, written only a few years before Julia Child's death. I remember pouring over those books and absorbing the recipes, the genuine passion on each page, and Julia Child's just-go-for-it attitude. "This is my invariable advice to people: Learn how to cook—try new recipes, learn from your mistakes, be fearless, and above all, have fun." While she might have meant these words to encourage cooking, the lessons they taught applied to every aspect of my life. It was a mantra I carry with me to this day, one that has shaped me and my views for the better: do not be afraid of failure because failure means you try.

I always kept those words of wisdom in my mind upon my arrival at Iowa State. I remember being particularly anxious about failure my first month, having moved in early to audition for the Cyclone Marching Band. I recall thinking to myself after hearing other auditionees play for the first time that I had no chance, but those years of encouragement and support reminded me that it was still worth trying and auditioning. Years later, I am returning for my fifth and final marching season, this time as a seasoned veteran section leader. Through the marching band, I have grown as a teacher, communicator, teammate, and overall person. It has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my college career. It could have been an opportunity I never pursued if I had given into self-doubt, but instead, I chose to "be fearless and have fun," as Julia Child would say.

While this might have been my motto coming to Iowa State, this university actively encourages students to follow these ideals by providing numerous opportunities for growth and involvement outside the classroom. Those avenues for me were Student Government, the Cyclone Marching and Pep Bands mentioned above, Boxing Club, my sorority, Engineering Student Council, and Engineers' Week. I have challenged myself and grown my leadership skills by serving as a section leader, elected Senator for the College of Engineering on Student Government, Vice President in both my sorority and Engineering Student Council, and Co-President of Engineers' Week for two years. While I have been able to become a more effective communicator, better organized, and more confident as a leader - the best part of every role I have served in has been helping others grow, giving back to my Iowa State community, and helping create an environment where other students can find their home here at the university.

Iowa State University also encourages students within the classroom and academics to challenge themselves, all my favorite professors at Iowa State repeatedly exclaim during their engaging lectures that they prefer if we respond with a wrong answer because it creates a learning opportunity. They teach that failure can be a good thing and that we shouldn't be afraid of it! They also emphasize another important lesson to not be afraid to ask for help and find a community of people that you can rely on. Several classes, I've taken that create a community for students to work together include one of my favorite classes Electrical Engineering 311: Electromagnetic Fields and Waves with Professor Mani Mina. I took the class virtually over the Summer 2022 session which under normal circumstances can cause feelings of isolation, however, Professor Mina helped me connect with other students to work with over the summer and willingly met with me for weekly meetings to discuss course material. By simply being open to asking for help and not being afraid of failing or answering a question wrong, I developed a deeper understanding and genuine appreciation for the course material.

This idea of asking for help and finding a community to work with extends beyond a few faculty members' personal ideals. Iowa State University's faculty has many avenues for students to find communities to help them achieve academic excellence. For myself, I found academic success by utilizing Iowa State's learning communities like Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE), individualized tutoring, and study groups with friends. Had I not been strongly encouraged to pursue and educated by faculty and staff about these resources – I would've struggled much more during my time at Iowa State. Don't get me wrong, I've failed my fair share of classes. I've had to retake courses, but with the added support of Iowa State's academic resources I have been able to grasp concepts I previously struggled with.

While I may have approached Iowa State with the mantra that you shouldn't fear failure because then at least you tried, I learned that there is an important flip side to that coin where asking for help and finding a community is just as beneficial as learning by mistakes. I was fortunate enough that Iowa State University provided me with numerous avenues to build my community for success inside and outside the classroom. I made some of my best friends, supporters, and study buddies through countless opportunities at Iowa State like Marching Band, Student Government, Engineers' Week, learning communities, and my courses. I believe Iowa State has enabled me with the skills to be not only a successful engineer but a happy and courageous person. Someone willing to take risks, go out on a limb, and embrace and learn from failure. In the words of Julia Child that I have etched forever in my mind, Iowa State has helped me "be fearless, and above all, have fun."