
INTERVIEW WITH RACHEL ADAMS, CLASS OF 2020

Ryan Cox 00:02

All right, this is Ryan Cox, digitization assistant and intern, here with Illinois State University grad Rachel Adams, on Thursday, August 4, 2022. We're going to look back and recount what her time here was like so that all those who are listening can learn about the campus and its culture. So Rachel, first of all, welcome. Thanks for coming in.

Rachel Adams 00:25

Thanks for having me.

Ryan Cox 00:26

Sure. So to start off, I'm going to ask this question about your experience: What brought you to ISU?

Rachel Adams 00:34

Sure, so I had visited a few college campuses before ISU when I was still in high school, and when I visited ISU, really just the environment struck me. People talk about it a lot, that it's a large campus, or, like, a large university with a smaller campus feel. I definitely feel that's true. So that's something I was looking for. For me, I didn't have a particular program I was interested in, I actually was accepted as a social work major before changing to English and then adding a double major in history. So, you know, that wasn't quite the draw for me. I know that there are some programs that people look at specific to ISU, but for me, really, it was just, you know, looking at the campus, what they had told me about living on campus, about the classes I could take. I explored the course catalog a lot, too. And yeah, that's what really drew me to ISU.

Ryan Cox 01:35

Where are you from? Was there any, like, vicinity [proximity?], that kind of drew you to it as well?

Rachel Adams 01:41

Sure, so I'm from the western part of the state, it's a small town called Rushville. If you know Western Illinois University, it is just about a half-hour from Macomb, where that's located. For me, I was really looking for, also, just kind of a sweet spot location for me that's not too close to home, could have some more independence, yet was still close enough I could see my family. There were a few people from my high school that had come to ISU before me and so I know that they had had good experiences. So that's kind of first what put it in my mind. Of course, being from that part of the state, Western was very popular with people from my school, as well as Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. But those schools just didn't really draw me in the way that ISU did. So that's why I wanted to come over here then.

Ryan Cox 02:35

Cool. You also mentioned that you came as a social work major. Maybe you could talk about your journey as far as switching your major and all that.

Rachel Adams 02:45

Of course, yeah. So, for me, the reason I was first drawn to social work was I was really just interested in being in a people-focused field, you know, helping people, really assisting with, like, social issues and things like that. And then actually, before I started ISU, I had a tour for admitted students and was able to learn a lot more about the social work program and realized it was a lot more kind of science- and data-driven than I was expecting and, you know, maybe you can guess that [as] I ended up switching to English and history that's not my interest. And so I thought, maybe social work is not for me, because even though I think that actually working in the field still would have been really interesting and fulfilling for me, the coursework just wasn't what I was looking for. So that's when I started exploring other majors.

Ryan Cox 03:50

Gotcha. But you definitely had prior interest in English and history, in those areas?

Rachel Adams 03:55

Yes, yep. I was always interested in those all through school, even from when I was a young child. But I was just not really sure what I could do with that at first. I kind of thought - I knew I didn't want to be a teacher, that just wasn't for me - but I considered maybe going into, you know, being an English professor. That's not what I ended up doing, but that's kind of the first idea that was getting me into actually majoring in English.

Ryan Cox 04:28

Were there any classes or professors that stuck out during your time studying here?

Rachel Adams 04:33

Yeah, for sure. Actually, I have a few professors both from English and history that really did stand out. In English, I took several classes with Dr. Susan Kim. She focuses a lot on Old English, the history of the English language and literature. I took, I think, nearly every class she offers, I may have missed one. But she was really just a joy to have as a professor. And that really was my focus as well. I wrote my senior seminar paper on an Old English poem from, I think, around like 1100 or 1000 AD. And so I really did just enjoy the material for classes and her teaching style as well. Also in English, Dr. [K. Aaron] Smith, who does work a lot with Dr. Kim as well, they co-teach a class and that's where I first met both of them. But he's a fantastic professor as well. He teaches a lot of linguistics, which was just really fascinating to me to explore the language we speak every day in just an entirely new way. And then in history, Dr. Katie Jasper, she also does a lot of medieval history. And so, again, that was more of my focus. But she also outside of class was so open to me coming into her office hours. During a semester when I was struggling a little bit more, she really just, you know, cleared a lot of things up for me, helped me get the work in on time, and so she was just fantastic.

Ryan Cox 06:13

Cool. How were you involved in the community on campus as far as, you know, student orgs or student jobs that you had?

Rachel Adams 06:25

Sure. So I worked as a student employee at Milner Library for most of the time I was at ISU. I started in spring 2018 and then I graduated in spring 2020, so I was at Milner that whole time. I really enjoyed that, not just being at a library, but I felt like I was in a really good position just to meet a lot of people there, which I really enjoyed. And then I also was a member of the ISU History Club, which is an RSO [Registered Student Organization]. And, again, super interested in history, so I was able to make a lot of fantastic friends that way. It's actually where I met my fiancé as well, in History Club. And so it was really just a good time being able to connect with other students with similar interests and then also have that opportunity to connect with professors outside of class and make those connections. And then, too, I did have a leadership position in that RSO for, I think, a year; I was their social media

coordinator. And so that was really fun too, to kind of explore that side of things. I've never been that active on social media myself, so being active for a club was really interesting.

Ryan Cox 07:44

Yeah, I bet it was interesting to learn that dynamic from a leadership position.

Rachel Adams 07:48

Certainly, yeah.

Ryan Cox 07:51

So going back to your work at the library, I'm not sure if you said it, what was your position there?

Rachel Adams 07:56

Sure. So I worked in Milner's Administration Office. So I wasn't doing, you know, the cataloguing or shelving that a lot of student employees there do but it was more of a receptionist type of role, clerical support. And so the Administration Office there, it was made up of about four or five people when I was there. And so that was really interesting. I felt like I was able to kind of have my hand in a lot of different parts of the library, learn a lot about how it functions, and, you know, the different staff that were there. And then, too, I had to learn a lot about Milner because people would call in with questions, you know, wanting to talk to a specific person in the library maybe and so just learning all of that, I felt like it exposed me to a lot of different areas.

Ryan Cox 08:51

Yeah, and I'm sure as someone who studies English, it may have been an obvious choice as well.

Rachel Adams 08:56

Oh, yes, for sure.

Ryan Cox 08:58

Cool. So you attended ISU from 2017 to 2020? Am I correct?

Rachel Adams 09:06

That's correct.

Ryan Cox 09:07

Awesome. Do you remember anything that sticks out about your experience during that time, as far as maybe historical events or like, you know, student drama or something like that?

Rachel Adams 09:19

Sure. Well, I mean, of course graduating in May 2020, the big historical event was COVID-19. That was my final semester at ISU, I actually was gone on spring break visiting my sister at the time and then we started getting all these emails that [said], you know, "We're going to push classes back a week," "Just kidding, we're not going back at all." So that was pretty stressful at the time, especially, too, having to start that job search. And so it was definitely probably the biggest historical event while I was there, at least related to campus anyway. But I'm trying to think if there was anything else specific, you know, during my time... nothing really comes to mind. That's a big one.

Ryan Cox 10:14

I'm sure that was definitely the biggest one.

Rachel Adams 10:17

For sure.

Ryan Cox 10:23

So did that hold back your graduation at all? The pandemic?

Rachel Adams 10:28

It did not. I think that it was really helpful that that was the half of the semester where we were really piloting Zoom for classes and so I think a lot of the faculty were really understanding about - I mean, they were learning this new system, they were having to put their in-person classes online, and so I feel like they were very open and understanding with the students as well. I certainly don't think that I would have done as well in my classes if not for my professors being so understanding. I had been doing fine up to that point but, of course, with the pandemic, that just threw everything into a frenzy. But I was really lucky to have some fantastic professors that, they were very communicative about, you know, their expectations for the rest of the semester so I was able to still graduate on the date that I had projected. But then, too, that did throw my job search back a little bit. Looking back now I would have liked to visit Career Services, and not just because I work there now, but because I do think that especially I didn't have a good idea of what I wanted to do at the time. Having majored in English and history, it's not quite as clear a career path as some of the majors that you find. So I just really didn't know where to start and so there was a little bit more of a delay there. I would have loved to start working right after I graduated, but I did have that summer off then and started work in August.

Ryan Cox 12:10

Luckily it didn't hold you back too much, as far as your career path. That's good.

Rachel Adams 12:14

Right, yep!

Ryan Cox 12:17

Let's see, so going back to your experience on campus, if I could ask, what was your experience as a queer person on the campus?

Rachel Adams 12:26

Sure, well, coming from a smaller town, honestly, I was really pleased with just the environment and the climate at ISU. I did feel like, you know, I didn't have to hide who I was. I felt like I was able to talk to my friends about anything and people I had just met in the dorm, or in my classes, people that are still friends today. So that was really, I would say, kind of a breath of fresh air, but I would have liked to have been more involved [in the queer community] too when I was a student, but I just, you know, bad luck. The Pride RSO on campus met at the exact same time as History Club every week so unfortunately I was not able to make it to Pride. But I do think that that's a wonderful organization. So that, too, is one reason why I was excited to join Queer Coalition on campus, which is for faculty, staff, and grad students. And there were times too as a student that there would be things around, you know. Some people would be saying some things, not to me specifically, but, you know, things that are still hurtful to overhear and then some of the - not to get too political, but, you know, some of the more conservative groups on campus sometimes would be posting things and just to see those fliers or something and to know like, "That's not for me, that's not a place that I can feel comfortable and safe" was kind of upsetting, but overall though, I do think that ISU as an institution, but also just the student climate too, I do find it is pretty open and I did feel like I was able to be myself.

Ryan Cox 14:20

Good, yeah. I know that there are people - that one pastor who sometimes comes on campus [George Smock, Jr., also known as Brother Jed] - I'm sure that was kind of a little, didn't make you feel too welcomed.

Rachel Adams 14:31

Yup, and yeah, even just as a woman, there are certainly some of those people that come on campus with the really hateful signs, yelling at the students. I'd say one of the few downsides of a public university it is a public space. Anyone can come on [campus].

Ryan Cox 14:54

You said you met - I was going to ask if there any people at ISU that you met who are still in your life, and I know you mentioned your fiancé, maybe you could talk about that.

Rachel Adams 15:04

Yes, yeah. So, my fiancé, we met in History Club. He was a couple years older than me in school and - but we really, I don't know, he just was very friendly and everything. But we would walk together sometimes after History Club, back to the dorm where he was living at the time. And so too, we also shared a lot of friends being in the same club as well, so that helped, we were all able to kind of spend time together as a group. And actually too, when we had graduated, both of us, we took pictures on that bench at ISU saying "We fell in love at ISU," you know, I'm very cheesy but I love that kind of thing. But, yeah, and so he doesn't work in town now but we do live here in Bloomington. But both of us still love to be involved with ISU, he's come with me to a few programs still that different groups will put on and with me working at ISU, usually I get to hear a lot about what's going on on campus so I can let him know and we can get to those things together, which is really nice.

Ryan Cox 16:17

Awesome. So outside of ISU, talking about the Bloomington-Normal community, did you find it easy to interact and find things to do off campus?

Rachel Adams 16:29

Yeah, so, to an extent, yes. I do feel like especially Uptown Normal, being just off of campus, was a really easy place to get to for students. I loved going to, like, the Normal Theatre to see movies, to go to the different restaurants uptown. But certainly, since graduating and then just living here, as a community member, I do feel like there was a lot of the community that I just didn't access while I was a student. And I think a lot of that has to do, one, with just the time commitment of being a student, you know, studying so much, writing papers, being in an RSO, having a job. I think [with] all of that, it was hard for me to devote any time to, you know, being more of a member of the community. But I do love when I see students that are, you know, being really engaged in the community as well because, yeah, as a ISU alum, an ISU employee, and then also just a resident of the town now, I really love to see those connections and to get people off campus more involved on campus, get the students more involved, you know, in the community because I really do think it's just a wonderful community, Bloomington and Normal both.

Ryan Cox 16:29

Awesome. So after graduation - I know you said that there was that whole experience with the pandemic making things harder so the first thing you did was take the summer off. What did the rest of your time after graduation look like?

Rachel Adams 18:05

Sure. So yeah, that summer really was, you know, applying to jobs, but also trying to take it easy, be like, this is the last time in my life probably I'm going to have a whole summer off, so just trying to enjoy that time. But then I did

start working at ISU Career Services in August of 2020 and I've been there since. I absolutely love being on campus and it's really interesting to be on a different side of campus now, to be staff, to be working with students. And then in my position now I do work more closely with employers, like bringing them to campus to hire students, and so that's been a really interesting experience. And I do feel like, too, it's just kind of a little more relaxing that, you know, I'm at work throughout the day, I enjoy my job, and then I get to go home and I don't have any homework, I don't have a paper due, I don't have a test coming up. So I do feel like I have that time then to just enjoy Bloomington-Normal, or even just to still enjoy campus. I still think that, you know, going and taking walks or bike rides around the Quad is a wonderful time and yeah, I mean, I might be cheesy, but I love being a Redbird. I really do. I tell everyone who asks, I'm like, "Yeah, I didn't want to leave ISU, they can't get rid of me that easily, so that's why I'm back."

Ryan Cox 19:29

So it was kind of your first choice to stay in the area, would you say?

Rachel Adams 19:33

It was, yeah. So again, not really knowing what I wanted to do for a career, I knew that I just I loved being here as a student and I really wanted to get back to this area. I think not only is the campus community and the, you know, the cities are just a good place to be, but, you know, it's really, in my opinion, a good location. It's about halfway between my family and my fiancé's family up in the Chicago suburbs and then there's, you know, plenty of other cities not too far of a drive off. And so I just said, "I want to get back to ISU no matter what," and so I did get a job with Career Services and then I actually started a new position with Career Services then this past January. So that's been really wonderful too. And just feeling like I'm in an environment that they really encourage you to grow in your career. I know so many people in my office alone that have gone back to school while they're working too, so I know that that's an option for me, which is really exciting.

Ryan Cox 19:34

So I guess it was probably a lot - oh, wait. Oh, sorry. I thought it was muted. Never mind.

Rachel Adams 20:54

No, all good!

Ryan Cox 20:55

So it was probably a lot easier after you graduated to interact with the community, right?

Rachel Adams 21:01

For sure. Yes.

Ryan Cox 21:05

So after you graduated, how did you stay involved as an alum? I know you mentioned Queer Coalition, but did you join that right away? Or was there kind of a - ?

Rachel Adams 21:15

No, I just joined that - I want to say either last fall or this past spring semester, but yeah, as an alum, it's kind of hard for me to draw a distinction between what I do as an employee and as an alum because I do get those, you know - I get emails both from the civil service listserv but then I also get alumni emails and so I don't know if there's as much I participated in as an alum other than just, you know, I can get in an alumni LinkedIn group and there's some different groups around just to stay in touch. And then I do still stay in touch with the friends that I made here at ISU as well who have since graduated. But I think that a lot of my alumni experiences do kind of just blend into my

employee experiences as well just because I'm just really passionate about, you know, getting people on campus, getting them exposed to what we do here, whether that's students, prospective students, employers, anyone - I just, I want anyone who can make it to come to campus.

Ryan Cox 22:34

Yeah, I can definitely see how just being on campus is kind of the same as being an alumni, because you're already so involved working here.

Rachel Adams 22:43

Yeah, I feel like it definitely helps to, you know, to be able to keep up on what's going on on campus, [if] there any events happening, or if there are changes in the majors or curriculum. I feel like I do get a bit more of that information than I would if I, you know, had graduated and moved somewhere else. So I am really grateful to be so close by and to still be able to keep up with campus.

Ryan Cox 23:11

Cool. So it looks like we're getting towards the end of our questions so I'm just going to ask one last one and don't be intimidated, but I just wanted to ask, what the most valuable experience, or what do you find most valuable, about your time at Illinois State?

Rachel Adams 23:32

Oh, boy, that is a big one. Wow, oh, gosh, I could go in so many directions with this because, you know, on the one hand, of course, I came out of ISU with with a fiancé, so that's pretty wonderful. But really just, I don't know, there's just something about ISU. I genuinely feel like anyone that I interacted with during my entire time there wanted me to do well, you know, any of the faculty or staff, bosses that I had, anyone there was always more than willing to answer any questions and even like, you know, not just answering my questions, but giving me advice and giving me tips about not just how to succeed as a student, but how to succeed afterwards, too, after I graduated. So I mean it might be a little bit vague to say that, but really just the people at ISU - I don't think that I encountered, you know, a single professor - and honestly even the students were really just, you know, motivated and I feel like everyone genuinely wants everyone else to do well at ISU and after they graduate as well, and to be part of a community, like, that is so focused on the rest of the community, is really wonderful.

Ryan Cox 24:57

Fantastic. Yeah, I bet it's great to be able to continue that with your work, too.

Rachel Adams 25:02

It is, it is. Especially to see, you know, my coworkers that do work more closely with students than I do, just to see the stories sometimes that they come with, you know, students who maybe had no idea what they wanted to do and after meeting with some staff members, or even some of our student employees too, that they then were able to find something that really they're passionate about. That's just, it's such a good feeling. I cannot even describe it, just to see students doing well. I really do love it.

Ryan Cox 25:38

Awesome. Well, yeah, that just about wraps us up so I'd like to thank you again for coming in and taking time out of your day. I really appreciate it.

Rachel Adams 25:47

Yeah, thank you so much, Ryan. It was great to meet you.

Ryan Cox 25:50

It was great meeting you too, and talking about this. Nice little trip down memory lane.

Rachel Adams 25:54

Of course, right.

Ryan Cox 25:56

Well, have a nice day. Bye-bye, now.

Rachel Adams 25:57

Thank you, you too! Bye.

Ryan Cox 26:00

Bye.