

INTERVIEW WITH Matthew RILLIE, CLASS OF 2015

Laura Schultze 0:03

All right. I'm Laura Schultze. I'm a member of the Student Alumni Council and I am talking with Matt Rillie of the Illinois State University Class of 2015 on April 13, 2021. During this oral history we'll we will be reminiscing about the way it was at ISU in 2015. We hope that those who listen to this tape will enjoy hearing from the person—persons—who have volunteered to record this bit of history and will find it interesting and informative. So first off, Matt, as you think back over the years, what are some things that are foremost in your memory of what life was like that ISU?

Matthew Rillie 0:49

Oh, so I started ISU in 2010 and literally, it was like my second week of school, I was on the quad for ISU Pride, meeting, their first meeting and wanting to like make some friends, meet folks, find, like, resources, all of that, and they were like, "We actually have a board spot open." So I was like, "I'll do it, that's a great way to start!" So I was one of those students who's just involved in everything, whether it be like clubs, whether it be advocacy for better policies, more resources, those were the spaces that I was in a lot. And that's what, that's like, what I think about, there was, like, there was a lot of folks in those spaces. My peers then, and I've heard, like, even peers now are, like, they cared a lot and they put that into action and I think it really says a lot because a lot of students are like, ISU has a lot of students who work, like, a bunch of jobs, who are layering a student job on top of maybe a coffee shop job on top of maybe serving on the edge of town or something like that, on top of being a student and then they give all of their extra time to investing in their community, their school, their peers, the future of those who come there. I remember, like, that being the feeling a lot, is that people wanted to, like, be really critical about the resources that they had, wanted to like advocate for better, but also, like, really wanted to radically have fun, that, like, we're going to do all this work and, like, every single thing that we do is fun. I don't know, I, like, remember that being just all the time. It's just feeling so alive in multiple ways.

Laura Schultze 3:00

Yeah, that's awesome. Was it like that your entire time at ISU? Like, did you feel that same energy and, like, want to have fun, but also want to do all the work? Did you continue that throughout your time?

Matthew Rillie 3:12

Absolutely. And even thinking back from, like, 2010 to 2015, even just, like, administration change, then. At the same time then, like, tech was growing. Like, I started school with a flip phone and then ended it with an iPhone, because that, like, changed so fast. So this, like, different ways to celebrate change all the time, but also the different needs changed so much. So yes, I remember, like, feeling that way for the whole, whole five years.

Laura Schultze 3:48

That's awesome. Was the change of needs kind of hard for you and ISU Pride to handle? Or was it more exciting changes?

Matthew Rillie 3:58

I think it was both. I, I remember higher ed as a whole but, like, definitely my time in college, like, we view student leadership as so much, like, we put a lot on student leaders and we expect them to, like, understand and roll with the change right away. But it took at least me and my peers, like, a long time to kind of figure out how do we even find out what our peers need? Like, what does sourcing needs look like? What does representation in our boards, what does that look like? What do different methods or different tactics or different eval processes look like to, like, meet needs and then go from there? So it was really, really exciting when that kind of clicked and when that worked. And then we'd see, like, a policy change or we'd see a different resource. I remember one of the things that we'd, like, advocated for for years was more inclusive bathrooms on campus. We were, like, "We have gendered restrooms everywhere, we shouldn't." I remember when we started, we had a list of like two and one was in the dorms that you can't get in. The other one was, like, a family restroom in Fairchild or something, I don't know. But we're, like, that's, we're a big state school, that can't happen, and it took a long time to figure out, like, well, how do we actually collect those needs? How do we actually get, like, those needs onto paper so we could advocate it for, to those who, like, hold that power. And then when it was a win, and we saw more being made, or more being changed like that, that was just, like, such a deep feeling of "We did this and we need to celebrate everything."

Laura Schultze 5:53

Yeah, absolutely. What an amazing accomplishment and just helped so many students, just for peace of mind, there are so many now, they're everywhere, which is awesome and so necessary. So I'm sure knowing that you've played a part in that, it's a really good feeling. I'm so kind of going off of that and advocating with those university officials. What, like, professors or university officials do you remember being such, like, a big part of your time here?

Matthew Rillie 6:28

Hmm. Oh my gosh, so many. I spent a lot of time in DA [Diversity Advocacy] with Pride. I believe a lot of the staff are gone, but Brittany Stokes was one of the staff who I believe she still works there, but she's in the TRIO area now. I remember she started as full-time staff my freshman year. So, like, seeing her grow professionally as I was growing up, like, a student, which, different things, but it was just, I just remember clicking so well and being so grateful for her leadership. Angela Davenport oversaw the DA then and was just, like, so cool, would just so effortlessly show up and just make it seem like she knew the work in the back of her head while always looking stylish. I just remember being so, like, grateful and inspired by her. Danny Matthews, who was there, he no longer works here, but he was a graduate student when I was a student and then got a full-time job and he's just been like a hero of mine for years. I also worked multiple student jobs in the Bone Student Center. One of my main roles there was, it's called, it's Tech, which I, I don't even... things have changed names with the Bone so much. I don't even know what they are called now but it's basically the folks who run, like, lighting and sound for all productions. Production Services was like our full name, but we were just casually known as like Tech. I spent so much time there and my bosses there, I don't know, just really, really wanted us to be happy and to, like, like our work and to like what we did. I just, there are, like, still folks, I think back, and being, like, if I didn't have this job, I would not have liked certain times in my life as much as I did. They, like, let us be goofy, they let us have fun, but they were also, like, this is what it's like to enjoy your job and this is what it's like to, like, have fun at work. And I've held, I, like, hold on to that so much as I've been professional. As I've been, like, I supervise staff, I supervise students, and trying to put some more depth, depth to that of being, like, how can we really make the space to, like, enjoy work and enjoy fun. My other job was—see the names have changed so much, I don't even know what to point to now, but it was the SIC which was where, like, all the student orgs were housed in [Baldwin?] Center, I think it's called, like, SAIC now, which I don't know what that stands for, but that's the acronym. Student Activities and Involvement Center, maybe, yeah, there we go. My boss there was [Steve Kai?] who sadly passed away in 2015. But there was also, like, a lot of folks who were in grad school to be graduates in higher ed, so they... it was Steve and then two grads who supervise the office and how they both, like, approached the work and how they talked about the field of higher ed as a whole is in part why I'm here, like, why I work in higher ed now and why like consider myself, like, wanting to stay in it for life. There's just a very unique way about how I think graduate students, how faculty and staff talk about, like, their reasons why they work at ISU, and it's in such a very passionate way that, that has always meant a lot.

Laura Schultze 10:40

Well, thank you for sharing so much about that. It's great to hear how much they've impacted you and have made you do what you want to do and know that you should be enjoying the work that you're doing and how to have fun doing that. So that's awesome. So outside of ISU Pride or Diversity Advocacy, were you involved in any other extracurricular activities on campus that you would like to touch on? If not, no biggie.

Matthew Rillie 11:12

Yeah, I was also involved in Leadership and Service, another office that the name has changed too much. When I was a freshman I went on the civil rights movement trip and loved it and then applied to be leadership the next year and ended up being, I think it was called the coordinator, but, like, the student who led the trip with a team of other students, and we actually re-named it to Leaders of Social Change, which I believe is still the name. And having that, like, program changed so much to what it was as civil rights movement trip to Leaders of Social Change was fantastic to be a part of and it made us...it made me at least think a lot about what, how I thought about, like, service learning work. How I thought that could fit into things I did with my peers or things I wanted to, like, advocate for. It's even been in... what I learned then, like, I don't view it completely the same way now. But it's, I've thought about it a lot since, like, 2010 until now, me being, like, a professional higher ed, that, that, that, like, really sparked something that's, like, what does education look like outside of the classroom. So I spent a lot of time, maybe too much time, thinking about that as, as a, as a student.

Laura Schultze 12:53

Yeah, that sounds like an incredible experience. Did you ever do, like, study abroad or anything like that? No. Okay.

Matthew Rillie 13:01

No, I was balancing a lot of student jobs and I think that's often, like, the hard part about college is I worked so many jobs to, like, make it through college that a lot of things that took me away from working I didn't do.

Laura Schultze 13:15

Yeah, absolutely. That's totally understandable. We kind of touched on this a little bit, but can you talk about what services were available to students on campus? So, like, health services, counseling, placement services? Just how do you think that's changed now that you are in higher ed compared to when you were in college? What is it like? Or what was it like then compared to what you see at the university you work at now?

Matthew Rillie 13:44

Yeah, I see a lot of the services that are there now were there when I was a student, whether that be everything that you just said or like Career Services or anything, I just think the way students find out about it has changed a lot. I remember coming to ISU and literally not knowing, like, I remember parking my car, I parked my car up by that parking lot by the, by the pool, and then walking back to campus with my flip phone being, like, where do I go? I don't even... I remember missing the turn and I ended up by Walmart walking for like half an hour. I mean, like, I can't do this. I have not set out to find resources at college. I can't even park my car. So it was a lot of, like, once I made, like, one friend and they had another friend and they had a friend who'd been here for like a year or two, that's how I found out about resources. Like that is, they're, like, "Oh no, go here," "This is where I'm going here," "This is what this building has," "This is what this academic space has," "This is what is in the Bone." A lot of it was found out that way and now I find it, even just, like, how new students come into college is just different. I did, like, the overnight preview. I did like campus tours, and I think they were just so focused on registering for classes then. And I think I've seen them now be, like, yes, we will get registration done but we also want you to like figure out how to be, how to be a student, like, find all the resources that you can find.

Laura Schultze 15:29

Yeah, absolutely. We definitely still do the overnight orientations and all that stuff but they definitely were more focused on not just classes, but also how to be a student, like you said, and knowing where to find things and resources that are available. So that's really interesting. What were some important like, local, regional, national events that happened while you were in school and how did that impact your schooling, if at all?

Matthew Rillie 16:08

Yeah, gosh, I mean, there was a lot from 2010 to 2015. That was a big old time in the world, and it still is. I remember it, just, like, affecting my peers and me a lot. ISU, because it felt, at least then, it felt like such a big, like, it felt like such a big school, and there would be times where I would catch myself and be like, wow, I haven't left campus in three weeks. Like, I've gone to class, I've gone to food, I've like walked off a little bit to, like, a coffee, or something, I haven't left campus in weeks. At least then when, like, news just looked different. Like I wasn't, I didn't have cable, I wasn't having, like, a newspaper. I just remember hearing about things, like, weeks later, or just feeling very, like, hyper focused on what was going on on campus. I feel like, I feel like even students feel that way, like do not feel that way now. Like they not only just are aware of events going on outside of campus and around the world and the country, but they, like, were like, "And we want a space to process this at school. We want the campus to respond. We want this to not

only be, like, aware of, but make space for." I feel like that was not the case when I was in school. It felt very, very separate.

Laura Schultze 17:54

Yeah, that's totally understandable. I still to this day, I feel like I am just super focused on what's around me and I think it's different now with our technology that we have, you know, stuff pops up on our phones all the time and tells us what's going on in the news. So it's definitely very different but I totally understand focusing on where you are now and not really realizing what's going on outside or not knowing what's going on outside. So thank you for sharing that. What were the most popular forms of entertainment on campus? So, what did you do for fun?

Matthew Rillie 18:31

Oh my gosh, so much. I... so me and my friends were big ole cheese balls and, like, we loved, loved going on bike rides, rollerblading. I forget the name of it, there's a lake, maybe it's Lake Bloomington, but it's, like, in the country, like, you drive out there and we would go out there and, like, literally lay on the hoods of our cars and, like, look at the stars and go on, like, long walks. It was just, we would always say, "Let's leave the city," or, like, "Let's feel like we're, like, go look at the stars," or something like that, which I feel like wasn't uncommon, like, that was not just my friends, that was, like, a very really wholesome fun thing to do. Me and my close peers, but always me, like, I have been a coffee drinker since I was 15 or 14, and, like, an avid consumer—I apologize to any doctors who might come around—but, like, we loved, like, to go and get coffee at, like, Coffeehouse mostly and literally sit there for, like, six hours, seven hours, and walk around. I only lived in the dorms for seven months and then I moved out to save some money and I lived in a house on Dewey, so, like, not off-campus, but like, off-off of it, and then my last year I actually lived in Bloomington above Castle Lofts, so I lived above Castle Theatre. And even just, like, walking home to my, where I was at, whether it be my house or my, my loft downtown, like, walking home with a friend was so fun, like going back and then even just, like, sitting outside. I just remember it, like, God, like, so much of what we talked about, of, like, the formative years of what you learned about yourself in college was, like, in those moments, was, like, after a class that you were just really excited about or after class it just like pissed you off and you're, like, I need to unpack this [audio cuts off]...