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## From Our Students: Annie Schone

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# From Our Students

ANNIE SCHONE

Augustana College (Rock Island), Class of 2015



On Sunday mornings growing up, I could always be found sitting beside my family, not swaying to music or even tapping my foot to the beat. This was the conservative church I grew up in, in a small town surrounded by cornfields in Central Illinois. I had a graduating class of 26, where our version of “interfaith” included having a Methodist, a Presbyterian, and a Lutheran all in the same room. I had never had a chance to meet a Muslim or a Jew, and I don’t think I even knew what Hinduism or agnosticism was. It wasn’t until my senior year of high school that I even encountered any sort of instruction on such things.

My pastor was doing a series that year involving different religions beyond Christianity. As I soon came to find out, his series was on why our faith (Christianity) was “right” and why such-and-such religion was wrong. Although I had never heard of the Interfaith Youth Core or Augustana’s Interfaith Understanding group, there was something in my gut that told me this was not the way I wanted to learn about these various traditions. So I soon left for college still searching for a way to simply learn.

My freshman year at Augustana, I came across the Interfaith Understanding group and became involved. Interfaith Understanding (AIU) is a student group run by students and strongly supported by faculty and staff. As a group, we work alongside many other campuses—largely through Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC)—with the ultimate goal of eliminating religious intolerance and increasing understanding for those of both religious and non-religious beliefs. For the first time in my life, I had

the opportunity to form friendships with students who were Muslim, Unitarian Universalist, and even atheist—something that simply was not possible in my small hometown. The work of AIU and IFYC quickly captured my heart and completely changed the way that I view and interact with those of differing belief systems.

Although I first participated in the interfaith movement as a way to learn about other beliefs, I soon discovered the deeper purpose behind these groups and the need for its work on our campus. One might view Augustana as a non-diverse place or feel that there is no religious intolerance here. Over the years, however, I’ve found both of these to be inarguably wrong. There is far more diversity at Augustana than may be present on paper and, sadly, intolerance is present as well. Because of this, the work of AIU and IFYC is all the more needed on our campus. I’m proud to be a part of a group that is working towards something bigger, and I hope such work will only continue to spread.

Though I still identify with my conservative church home and still honor that community that was so much a part of my upbringing, I long for them to see the joy that I have found in having friends from outside my own faith. I hope that through my own stories I can bring them at least a little piece of that. Through my work with IFYC, in particular, I’ve learned that storytelling is a powerful thing, and so whether I’m in the middle of a bustling college campus or back on that old wooden church pew, the power of interfaith relations can still live on.