

2010

Erin Blecha

Erin Blecha

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Blecha, Erin (2010) "Erin Blecha," *Intersections*: Vol. 2010: No. 31, Article 11.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2010/iss31/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Intersections* by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.



Erin Blecha

You rarely realize the effect something will have on your life. In hindsight, it is much easier to recognize how a seemingly trivial moment transformed your life path. Walking into a small office in the corner of the Augustana College

library, and meeting the Center for Vocational Reflection, in its “skills, gifts, and passions” touting glory, was my moment.

The skills, abilities, and direction I found working closely with the CVR have given me a sense of what I am about, what I am meant to be about. I’ve realized that life is about the process of living, and while you can’t ignore the realities of the working world, you can make the most of it by finding joy through vocation. I entered college to become a physical therapist, but struggled miserably with the curriculum, all the time wondering, why do something I hate just to end up as something I’m not sure I want to be? When I first went to the CVR, they first asked me what got me excited? What motivated me? What was I good at? I had two answers: sports and planning events.

Being a part of the CVR was the most natural thing to me. It wasn’t a job, it was a constant growth experience. I was able to travel to leadership conferences around the country, work with non-profits to set up volunteer programs, speak to incoming freshman and my peers on vocational reflection, and challenge myself to find my true skills, gifts and passions along the way.

Within my first few months at the CVR, they gave me the greatest gift possible. They told me to come up with an idea to get students involved in vocational reflection, and that together we would make it happen. I ran with this opportunity, focused on creating an athlete service program. My dream job was to work in the NFL doing community relations, and I saw this as a step in that direction. I based the program on the idea that athletes listen to their peers and would participate under the team mentality. Student-athletes would become involved and at the same time would get to see their teammates in a non-competitive, service setting. I worked closely with SAAC, the athletic administration, and the CVR to create a formal program proposal, initiate the process with athletes, and implement the program. I worked closely with community organizations to determine what they needed, and how young, enthusiastic student-athletes could help meet those needs. The first semester we were able to get over 100 athletes from eight teams involved

in our four projects: a town clean-up day, a trip to the children’s miracle network, a buddy day with three community youth groups, and a field day with over 100 kids from the area.

The CVR helped us realize pretty quickly that the impact of volunteering would be lost if the athletes didn’t have the opportunity to reflect on the events. We created a reflection form asking the participants to assess the event. Walking away from the events, student-athletes talked about what they did. Soon enough, you heard talk of the program in the weight room, around campus, and in the classroom as athletes brought those experiences into their daily lives. The following year we expanded due to the demand of teams interested in getting involved. In that year 300 student-athletes volunteered 1,100+ hours through 29 service projects. Athletes Giving Back (AGB) had arrived.

Like most programs, the greatest challenge was in sustaining the energy that came with the first year’s success. I had no doubts. The program had been rooted in SAAC from the beginning, and two officer positions had been created to be in charge of organizing and running AGB. We used the second year as a transition to enable the program to be fully functional and sustainable through the athletic department. Now, in its fifth year, with the last batch of “original” AGB participants on the way out, the program is still thriving. In a few short years, the founding group of AGB will be completely forgotten, replaced by new student-athlete leaders, with new ideas. My hope is that AGB continues, but I believe that if for some unforeseen reason other students do not continue its passion, in the future a new wave of students will come to Augustana, and one spunky, determined student will connect with the CVR and have their pivotal life moment, just like I did; then, who knows what type of program will come of it!

I now work in marketing and community affairs for a collegiate athletics program, directing in-game promotions, organizing community events for athletics, and developing programs for the students; but I’m on the other side now. I’m the one giving support, encouragement, and opportunity to my interns, my student-athletes, and my group leaders. Not a day goes by when I don’t ask them to reflect on things, consider how their skills, gifts, and passions come into play, and challenge them to try new things. I find myself using those tools as second nature. My students have come to expect questions, challenges, and support to try new things. I still haven’t stopped being surprised as each day a new, brilliant idea comes forward. I have learned that empowering students to discover their vocation yields rewards far greater than I ever imagined.