



Alumni Association Scholarship 2021 Recipient Essay

by Kimberly Fazio '21

My most lived by quote was first spoken by my father: “Be an eagle, not a sparrow.” I have grown to interpret this simple 6-word quote as, be a leader, not a follower. In my time at ICO, I have tried to embody this to the best of my ability.

I am currently referred to as the “Immediate Past President of Student Association.” During my active time as president in my 3rd year, I had a laundry list of responsibilities that were both handed down to me from past presidents as well as ones that I created on my own. I began this process as class representative for my 2021 first year class. In my second year serving as President-Elect under Fran Mangahas, I successfully planned ICO Olympics, Casino Night and Eyeball. While planning Eyeball, I was able to take the student association account out of debt and implement a list of protocols for budgeting and planning for future presidents to ensure successful events in the future. In my 3rd year as active President I worked to oversee the planning of these events with my then president-elect Bryce Boente. In both years, I sat in on and contributed to numerous Board of Trustees and Alumni Association meetings and conference calls where I served as the voice for ICO students to my elders. I provided feedback, opinions and insight into what student life is like at ICO and made sure that I advocated for the best decisions on behalf of my colleagues. I have come to understand what it truly means to be as professional as you can be in a room full of people who are years and years ahead of you. I am lucky that I was given this opportunity because it allowed me to find a voice in many situations where I was not at all in my comfort zone. By far one of the most humbling experiences was getting to sit in on the House of Delegates meeting at the AOSA conference in St. Louis as a delegate for ICO. I was able to surround myself with thousands of representatives from each state across the country and learn what it was to be a voice for something much bigger than myself.

In addition to my expected responsibilities, I decided to add more to my plate and help ICO’s business office create a new system for charging students. As difficult as it was to take away the “Monopoly Money” mentality from my fellow students, I did my best to co-create a system with cheddar up that I believe meets the needs of both students and staff. There was never very strong communication between the business department and the fundraising section of clubs at school, but I believe I have left this system better than it was when I started.

Along with my responsibilities as SA president, I have also dabbled in co-running a research project investigating the value of telehealth in the optometry setting, serving as a tutor to fellow colleagues and holding the position of Vice-President of Gold Key Society. But since my physical time at ICO has come to a close, I made it my ultimate goal to display myself as the strong leader and professional that ICO taught me to be, while on externship. In my most recent externship at the Wyomissing Optometric Center in Pennsylvania, I was put to the test. After a month at this clinic, I had earned my respect but I wasn’t done. One of the Doctors at the practice was blindsided by a career pausing bicep tendon tear.

He was rushed into surgery and was instructed to not use his arm for anything, something that proved difficult with a full patient schedule. I was pulled aside by my preceptor and tasked with the goal of being this Doctor's "right hand man." Essentially, I was to take on his entire patient schedule, 20-25 patients per day all on my own, for the last two months at this site. Obviously, I was offered support and instruction from the conference room, but I took this as an opportunity to mimic the real world. I made the effort to request as little assistance as possible, and only ask for help when I truly was stumped.

I am now seeking a residency position, primarily in the VA setting. In my residency interviews these past few months, I was able to brand myself as a motivated clinician and leader. My favorite point to highlight is all that I have learned from my time at ICO as a student leader. I began as someone who took pride in setting the rules and having people follow them. I thought taking on other people's responsibilities when they were not willing to do so was a positive trait, however as I grew as a leader, I came to realize I had a lot to work on. I had to become a successful delegator and teammate. I learned how to highlight my team's positive traits and help them succeed for the greater good of the group. I learned that the best leaders need to double as strong teammates. I believe this is a trait that will make me a wonderful resident and future independent clinician.

I have grown into a professional and a confident leader, all thanks to my mentors here. My only promise going forward, is that I will continue to be the eagle.