

Jodi Harper
'Choosing the BIS degree'
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All my life I've been a people pleaser. As the oldest of four children, I was the one involved in extra-curricular activities and always trying to please my parents while setting an example for my younger siblings. I was in 4-H. I was in FFA. I was in the church youth group. I was in band. I was in chorus. I played any sports offered through school or the local rec club. I babysat. I enjoyed school for the most part. I listened to and respected adults. I was everyone's favorite, and I must have been a nightmare for my younger siblings since we are only 5 years apart and all went to the same small private school.

In High School I continued on that path of doing everything that others thought was good for me. I got a job so that I could save money and buy a car when I turned 16. I was involved in all sorts of clubs offered through school. I didn't party or get in with the wrong crowd, and my Friday nights consisted of a "date with the couch so the tv could watch me sleep." I figured that I had been quite successful in life doing what everyone said I was good at; I should just keep at it. I didn't really know what I wanted or what made me truly happy, but I figured it couldn't hurt to keep to the path I was on.

College is where I first started to realize I needed to journey on a path of self-actualization and started to branch out on my own, slowly but surely. Well, more slowly than surely at first, but I've never seen anyone take large steps without faltering a little. In high school I worked at a local pharmacy as a cashier and the pharmacist took me under his wing and trained me to work as a pharmacy tech. I

figured that I liked helping people and could count pills, so under my parents' encouragement I was enrolled at Ferris State University in the Pre-Pharmacy program. I did relatively well in my science classes, but math was another story. I performed poorly enough that I decided to switch my program after my second semester. Because my desire to help people around me was a driving force behind my decision to study Pharmacy, that and the encouragement of my family to pursue a career with a large paycheck like pharmacy, I figured Elementary Education was a logical switch since all my teachers in junior high and high school told me I would be a good teacher.

Fast-forward a few years through my getting involved on campus, through my breaking up with my high school sweetheart I had followed to Ferris, through a bad car accident which left me on crutches for six months after four surgeries with no one thinking I'd ever walk correctly again, to my employment at the Student Leadership and Activities Office (herein referred to as The SPOT). This is where those steps to branch out on my own started to be more sure than slow. My time at The SPOT was vital to me for three reasons - I was introduced to the world of non profit organizations; and I was surrounded by positive, encouraging, supportive people; and I met my mentor who taught me what it means to be an independent woman and to follow your dreams. I realized that I had been constantly falling in this hole of doing what everyone else thought was right for me, getting out and brushing off only to fall back in again.

I loved the work that I was doing through The SPOT that I started to putting all my time and energy into my extra-curricular activities and work and quit doing my

schoolwork. I still went to class every day, I just never turned anything in. During this time No Child Left Behind was in its prime, and I was really beginning to doubt my choice in pursuing a degree in Elementary Education. I just didn't feel the passion for teaching like I did working at The SPOT and being involved in the community. Thanks to the guidance and brilliance of my mentor, I came to find AmeriCorps. I knew my family wouldn't be happy at the idea of me moving out of Michigan to be a 'full-time volunteer' for some non profit, but it was time for me to leave the Oceana County bubble I had lived in my whole life and start to step out on my own path. Who was your mentor?

Through my research to find which AmeriCorps program was a good fit for me, I came to find City Year. I moved from Michigan to New Hampshire, and went head first into learning the ins-and-outs of the non profit world. During my time with City Year I knew I made the right decision to leave my family and go out on my own. Working with non profits and community organization brought out a passion for me that I had never felt when I was in Michigan following the path that my family and community had laid out for me. When I moved to Manchester I was introduced to the world of refugee and immigrant resettlement where I really seemed to find my niche. My City Year team volunteered at an after school program that had students from all over the world. I worked with kids from 24 different countries and nearly every continent who spoke over 26 different languages. Needless to say, I was hooked on working with this demographic and was hired by that after school program to work full time once my time at City Year was through.

Although leaving Michigan and Ferris was a monumental step in helping me realize the career path I wanted to follow, it pained me that I had left without finishing my degree. So many hours and so much money spent to walk away with nothing. A friend had reminded me that with most institutions you can't transfer or use credits after 10 years, so I realized I needed to get on finishing school if I was going to make all the debt I had accrued as an undergrad a wise investment. Knowing I didn't want to finish in education, I reached out to my advisor to see what my options were. She suggested BIS, as I use my education background to develop curriculum for our nursing and art program, and I use my social studies background for my administrative work. So here I am in my last semester as a BIS major. I had fallen into the hole of doing what everyone else thought was best many times, but I finally learned that wasn't good for me, and am now on a different path, one that I chose for myself. And for those of you who were wondering what my family thought of all this, they are very proud of the work I do and try to visit New Hampshire whenever they can.