

Hi everyone. For those of you in the room who don't know me, and a little reminder for those who do, my name is Anna La Forest. I am a psychology major with minors in Deaf studies and special education, I am from a small town in Michigan near Detroit (go pistons), I am a daughter, sister, friend, and now I get to add a Xavier graduate (if all goes well these next few weeks). When I say that word graduate, it doesn't feel real. I mean, this has been my home for the last four years. I've created family here, and it doesn't seem right that I leave it all in a few weeks. But then I think to myself, I'm not just leaving. I've planted roots here, so I am leaving something behind.

Xavier has given me so many opportunities to plant seeds and grow in so many different aspects of my life. I have been involved in a plethora of things on campus. I am finishing this year as president of Xavier Singers and Sign Language Club. I did club running and ran my first half marathon without training (don't recommend) I have been a member of the orientation team for three years. I am a tour guide for admissions, a notetaker for disability services, and am an x-path coach for neurodivergent students. I wear a lot of different

hats on campus, but who am I when I take off the hats? Xavier has helped me figure that out as well.

Through all the experiences I have had on campus, there has been one thing that binds them all, and that is my life motto: "don't be afraid to be uncomfortable". Now, I used to think being uncomfortable was the least desirable thing. Like when I think of uncomfortable, I think of my sleeves getting wet when I'm washing my hands or being stuck in the middle seat for an 11-hour drive on a family road trip. But I've realized during my time here that not liking something and being uncomfortable are two totally different things.

For example, I had the chance to share my eating disorder journey for real world Xavier which was very very uncomfortable. It's not that I didn't want to share my story, I think vulnerability is strength and it can be of value to others but sharing it in front of 1,000 people was new for me and caused me a bit of anxiety, and for those who know me well, you know I already have terrible anxiety. But some situations are worth the risk because on the other end of it is something you couldn't even predict.

From sharing my story, singing in front of large audiences, presenting my research at a national conference, going to Deaf community events with minimal sign language skills, and taking the risk of eating the chicken in the caf, it has become abundantly clear to me that being uncomfortable now is second nature.

The next chapter of my journey will be at Marquette for clinical mental health and rehabilitation counseling (don't worry, I will always be a Xavier basketball fan). Will it be a little uncomfortable at first? 100%, but I was uncomfortable coming here to, and look how that turned out!

The point is, Xavier has given me the chance to spread my wings and soar to heights I didn't think I could reach (and not just because I'm short). I know that when I step foot off this campus, I am leaving with the many lessons Xavier has taught me, and I like to think Xavier will be left with many things I've taught it through connection with others and being a leader on campus.

Xavier has made me who I am today, and if there's one thing it has taught me and I hope stays behind for the students and staff still at the school it is this: don't be afraid to be uncomfortable because

you never know what will spark your interest, benefit you, and what makes a house a home, just like Xavier has been a home for me, until you dive into life's opportunities and try. Thank you.