Reflections by David, ACES Sophomore

My first year of college was undoubtedly the most challenging and difficult year of my life, but it was also the most enjoyable and rewarding. I accomplished far more during my freshman year than I thought possible, including maintaining a 4.0 GPA, and believe my successes were made possible because I did one thing that is often neglected by other students— I took advantage of the ample resources and opportunities available through the University of Illinois and the College of ACES.

With over 1,100 registered organizations at the UIUC, it is nearly impossible not to find an organization that matches your interests. On quad day I signed up for about 5-6 organizations, but only became actively involved in two of them. One of those was the Illinois Student Senate (ISS). Through the ISS, I became a voting member on the Community and Governmental Affairs (CGA) committee, and a member of the New Leaders Development Program. The ISS taught me so much about how our campus and student body are governed, and also put me in a good position to run for other leadership positions next year.

The second organization I was actively involved in was Hall Council, where I was elected Vice President of Snyder residence hall. This position required me to manage a team of ten students, who were responsible for recognizing the contributions of Snyder staff and students. This position gave me valuable leadership experience, as well as allowed me to meet other students and obtain the confidence to lead larger RSO’s in the future.

The most memorable and rewarding experiences I had, however, came from some extraordinary opportunities provided to me through the college of ACES. During the fall semester and at the recommendation of Dean Emmert, I applied for the Agriculture Future of America (AFA) Leaders conference. I was accepted within a month and traveled with other top students to the event in Kansas City. At AFA, I had the privilege of meeting top college students from across the country, and we learned about prevalent issues facing the
industry. At AFA we also had the opportunity to network with employers from top companies, many of which offered internships and entry level positions. As freshman, these networking opportunities are crucial, because many employers stay in contact with you throughout your college career and may have a job available for you after graduation.

In November I learned of another program called LeaderShape, which takes place a week before the start of the spring semester. I applied for this conference as well, and was accepted along with nine other students from ACES to attend this prestigious institute. ACES also provided full sponsorship to all ten of us. At this event I had the opportunity to meet many other student leaders from UIUC. In fact, I met the Interfraternity Council President, who encouraged me to rush his fraternity during the spring semester. Sure enough, I ended up pledging during the spring, and am now an active member.

My freshman story is just a small sample of the vast opportunities available to students through the UIUC and the college of ACES. Whatever your interests may be, you will find opportunities to meet other students and obtain leadership experience in that area. The challenge is to be proactive and find these opportunities by speaking with staff, students and alumni; doing this will help you create your own successful freshman story!

Next year I will continue utilizing the vast resources available to me through the University of Illinois and College of ACES. As a sophomore, I plan on using the ACES study abroad program to travel to Argentina. This study abroad program is specifically designed for ACES students and allows them to complete courses for their major, an internship, and learn Spanish. I also worked during the summer 2014 at a law office in Chicago. As you can see it was a busy and exciting first year, and I plan to make every year just as memorable and rewarding!

Note: David is now serving as one of three Student Senators for the College of ACES.