The ideal college experience can be defined as an experience in discovery. This concept can be applied within an educational context as well as a more personal discovery of self. This is a time of new ideas, new ways of thinking, of understanding different perspectives – no longer merely reading and regurgitating the material, but acquiring the tools necessary to think critically. By taking an active role in my education I have used personal narrative, discussion, and debate with both faculty and peers to confront the tangible reality that is represented by the perfectly printed words within these brightly bound textbooks. The well-rounded college curriculum serves as an awakening from the slumber of adolescence. This academic environment strives for greater analysis of the complexities of society, through numerous areas of study, as well as one's own individual outlook. It is through my own increasing awareness of the world around me and fascination with courses that reflect and dissect society that has led to an interest in sociology, and the Individualized Major Program has allowed me to focus my interest in feminism into what I feel is the well-balanced and inspirational major of Women's Studies. Obtaining a more informed and open-minded opinion of the world is certainly a worthy goal of college, but I am most grateful for the chance to use Women's Studies to learn more about fellow women worldwide along with an awareness of the ailments of society historically and currently which have led me to a desire to remain in the world of academics. My newly developed social consciousness, aided in its development by Women's Studies and Sociology has led to my desire for a future occupation as a college professor. The progress of society as a whole lies with future generations, and
the eradication of ignorance, fear, and hatred can be best achieved through education. My involvement in the Individualized Program has invoked in me an even greater respect for educators and a personal goal of hopefully making a mark on the lives of future students.

Women’s Studies can be described as an interdisciplinary major that is still relatively new. Developed in the 1970’s, Women’s Studies was created due to the fact that the perspectives of the established college-level courses were too narrow, often excluding the female voice entirely. Today, over thirty years after it’s inception, Women’s Studies is certainly a recognizable major nationwide, and is currently offered as a Minor at IUPUI and both as a Major and Minor at IU Bloomington. The Individualized Major Program has offered me the invaluable opportunity to obtain my undergraduate degree in Women’s Studies here at IUPUI and to immerse myself in this personal passion which I believe will remain a part of who I am throughout my lifetime. I wish to graduate with this degree and then continue to graduate school for Sociology. I feel that Women’s Studies is strongly linked to Sociology since it was one of the first fields to include research pertaining to the experiences of females, and the Feminist Perspective is now a widely known tenet of Sociology. However, I have chosen to major in Women’s Studies rather than Sociology to gain an education that includes both the large scale vision of perspectives within sociology, history, and law along with the more individual voices found within religion, literature, and philosophy. An important element of Women’s Studies is that it guides students to make connections between the course material and the political and social context
within which it is embedded, crossing the boundaries of gender, race, and sexuality.

I have taken a variety of Women’s Studies courses, their topics covering a wide range of ideas, but together they form an interesting and cohesive curriculum. Each class builds on the last, revealing a flow of cause and effect from thought to action that has affected women’s and men’s understandings of gender and subsequently their places within society.

The early logic of Philosophy can be seen in religion, specifically Christianity, where the respected concepts of reason versus passion helped ignite ideas within Christian thought that certainly affected women of that time (and today), their options, their positions within the community and the divine. The early Christian ideas about women as being intrinsically linked to the animalistic desires of the body while men are more in tune with the superior reasoning of the mind stem from Greco-Roman philosophy. By incorporating these centuries-old theories into their religion, Christian intellectuals validated their faith with ideas viewed as academic, transforming the believer into a scholarly philosopher. In courses like Women and Religion and Women and Islam I researched the complex histories of numerous religions. The role that women have played within world religions as well as the great influence religion has had on creating roles for women was a central theme in both courses. In these classes I was able to see both the larger picture of the religious role throughout history and the individual perspectives of women’s positive and negative experiences with religious thought. The course Two Centuries of
Feminist Thought not only uncovered early Roman ideas about body and mind in relation to gender but also made available to me brilliant works of female philosophers. I delved into the manifesto of Mary Wollstonecraft, devoured the social criticisms of Simone de Beauvoir and silently cheered as I read the perfectly articulated arguments of Harriet Taylor Mill.

In Gender in Cross Cultural Perspectives I looked at what gender means around the world, and was reminded of America's ethnocentric idea that our understanding of gender is “universal”, when obviously it is not. This class delved into a variety of cultures around the globe, from the Iroquois of Early America to the traditions of several cultures of Africa. Because of this education in a wider cultural pool I feel more capable of comprehending the complexities of the increasingly smaller, but no less diverse, global community. While Gender in Cross Cultural Perspectives identified gender roles and practices through the summaries of anthropologists' research, my Women and Literature class was an opportunity to hear the voices of these women as individuals. Books like Yoruba Girl Dancing and Nervous Conditions allowed for a more intimate look at two young girls in Africa under startlingly different circumstances. The stories of these young women began where the anthropologists cannot tread – into the minds and hearts of the individuals, their family dynamics and personal struggles and experiences on their way to adulthood. This literature course was filled with fiction, non-fiction, and touching autobiographies – all beautifully articulated by women. Throughout the semester I was thankful for a course that recognized the voices of these women, which allowed me as a female student to better visualize
myself as an individual with something worthwhile to say. By reading the words of these women, their countries of origin spread all over the globe and the conditions of their lives so varied, their voices became as real as those of my fellow classmates, and their perspectives analyzed and valued as they deserve to be.

In my pursuit of an education in Women’s Studies I have found countless heroines in the history of our country and globally. I have certainly absorbed lessons about oppression and discrimination, eye-opening experiences that transcend gender. I feel I am attaining a more balanced view of the world by researching the triumphs and failures of humankind as the culmination of actions, both subtle and overt, of individuals of all genders, races, cultures, and religions. I am both thankful for and extremely proud of my college experience because it has not only helped me to discover the path I wish to follow but also to develop a social conscience that will certainly aid me in all of my future academic and professional endeavors.