

Ali Marie Hillman
Personal Statement

To the Student Life Selection Committee at Emory & Henry College,

As a Head Resident Advisor, I have encountered difference in its most organic form. Living with students who are transitioning to college life, to a major step in independence and a key phase in identity formation, I have been privy to the all the quirks, triumphs and challenges of that transition. I am able to actively engage students in dialogues of difference, unity, identity and discovery. My joy in being a HRA does not come from the documentation of incidents or the enforcing of rules, though those are occasional necessities of the position; the joy comes from the moments of chaotic joy intrinsic to residence life and the trials inherent to growth. All the experiences therein, whether they entail developing the organizational skills necessary to plan hall programs or the listening skills necessary to honor a resident's particular narrative, are helping me to assemble a toolbox of skills that will serve me in my future career.

It is my hope to pursue a graduate education in student affairs and neurodiversity inclusion that I may then translate to a college or university setting. I know whatever professional avenue I pursue will hinge on interactions with others. My leadership experiences as a wilderness instructor within the Emory & Henry College Outdoor Program have provided me with the ability to evaluate potentially risky situations and make appropriate decisions regarding the safety of others. This leadership position has provided me with tangible certifications that enhance my capacity to connect with others and to foster a comfortable environment for trip participants. The process of forming a Catholic Student Ministry on my undergraduate campus allowed me the opportunity to connect a small and occasionally marginalized community with local resources for support. Within the scope of my college career I have utilized these skills to begin forming an inclusive neurodiversity model for higher education. In the Fall of 2015 I was able to present a program on neurodiversity inclusion for the Virginia Association of College and University Housing Officers Conference that gained conference recognition. In the Spring of 2016 I became a finalist for the Truman Scholarship, highlighting federal policy proposals that would enhance neurodiversity inclusion in higher education. In the Fall of 2016 I will present a panel on the intentional living model that I helped establish as a marriage between student affairs and academia within the Emory & Henry College Honors Program. I very much hope that as I continue to develop these skills and networks, I will be able to better honor difference and assist in effectively integrating it into a positive experience of higher education.

"We need to reach that happy stage of development when differences and diversity are not seen as sources of division and distrust, but of strength and inspiration." – Josefa Iloilo

Regards,
Ali Hillman

