



Madison Vandersee

Majors: Geography, environmental studies

Minor: Geology

Activities: Geography Club, Udden Geology Club, Sigma Gamma Epsilon (earth sciences)

Internships: Research assistant for the Rock Island District Forest Management Partnership through the Army Corps of Engineers; project coordinator for the Seminary Hill Invasive Management Initiative through Augustana's Upper Mississippi Center

Post-grad plans: Beginning in June, I will be working with the National Trails System based in Santa Fe, N.M., through the Student Conservation Association and AmeriCorps. I will be creating GIS-based signage on trails as well as working with partners and volunteers to improve visibility of the trails.

“As a first-year student, it was clear that Madison intended on experiencing all that Augustana could offer. As a sophomore, we began to tease her that she had been present for every department field trip since her arrival. As a junior, Madison took on leadership roles and research duties. She explored Ireland, Hawaii and the American West. As a senior, she developed a rigorous independent research project and gracefully pivoted when that project fell through. And throughout it all, Madison has been a friend to everyone, a complete scholar and a joy to see in Swenson Geosciences. She did college right, and I can give her my biggest compliment—I'm lucky to know her.”

— Dr. Matthew Fockler, assistant professor, geography

MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2018

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

Why Augustana?

My older sister went to Augustana, and every time I visited the campus, I fell a little more in love. On one of my visits, I sat in on a couple classes and talked to a few professors. I felt immediately welcomed as I joined in the class discussions, and I loved the small class size. From that visit, I really saw myself fitting in well at Augustana.

Are you where you thought you'd be when you first came to campus?

I came to college with so many ideas of careers I would be interested in pursuing, but I had no clear vision of where I would end up. My professors especially have been super helpful in providing real-world experiences in our classes and were great about explaining that there are so many opportunities out there—and not one of them is a bad option if you go into it with an open mind to where it could take you.

Who helped you get to where you are now?

I cannot even begin to describe how amazing the geography professors have been in helping me get to where I am now. I came in knowing I loved geography, but the professors helped me find my passions and gain experience in the field, building the skills I will need for jobs in the future. Special shout-out to Dr. Fockler for being my go-to guy for advice, inspiration and just great conversations.

Peak experience?

I have been so lucky to be able to travel through and explore 18 states and four countries while at Augie. I could never pick one moment that topped all the others. Every trip had its highs from hiking the lava flow of Kilauea in Hawaii to celebrating St. Patrick's Day in Cork, Ireland. All of these experiences have helped me become more rounded as a person and will guide how I understand people and places in the future.

What surprised you?

I learned that I am capable of much more than I used to give myself credit for. I have been a part of so many projects that have challenged me, but I worked through them and grew from the experiences.

How did you use Augie Choice?

I went on Ireland Term in spring 2016 and used my Augie Choice to cover flight and program costs. Traveling around the coast of Ireland and visiting places so rich in history and culture was amazing.

What will you miss the most?

I am going to miss the people I have grown so close to. I came in knowing very few people, but through work and classes, I know I have made friends that I will keep in contact with forever.

Advice for the Class of 2022?

Embrace the opportunities that come your way. Go on the field trips. Get to know your professors. Be involved in the community. All of the experiences you have at Augie are setting you up for the rest of your life, so go out there and rock it!