



Cheyenne Bartelt

High school: Belvidere High School

Hometown: Belvidere, Ill.

Majors: Geology; geography

Minors: Geographic information science and technology (GIST)

Activities: Augustana theatre (dancer), Geology Rocks educational program, Geography Club, Udden Club, Delta Omega Nu fraternity (honorary), Augustana Cheerleading

Internships: Lower Mississippi River channel morphology project with Dr. Reuben Heine; Terrestrial LiDAR Analysis of Urban Stream with Dr. Ranbir Kang at Western Illinois University; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Species Database Project with Dr. Reuben Heine and Dr. Jenny Arkle; Upper Mississippi River Coring Project with Dr. Jenny Arkle and Dr. Kelsey Arkle; Upper Mississippi Center GIS technician

Post-grad plans: I have an internship with the U.S. Forest Service as a cartographic technician assistant. My internship is remote so I plan to travel around the U.S. for a year before applying to graduate programs.

“Cheyenne’s passion for maps and the environment sent her navigating through geology and geography majors and a GIS minor. Through her determination and creativity, she reconstructed ancient environments and the paleogeography of the Caribbean over millions of years! Her journey took numerous paths, including collaborating with professors and students from other universities and even executive directors of consulting companies to produce a top-level senior thesis. She’s landed a position as a cartographic technician with the U.S. Forest Service, and has certainly mapped a course for a very successful future!”

— Dr. Jenny Arkle, assistant professor; geology, geography, environmental studies

Why Augustana?

I vividly remember my first Augie visit, specifically not wanting to go. I also vividly remember being completely entranced talking to the faculty and staff once I got to campus.

I was on campus for not 30 minutes and knew I had found my place. I chose Augustana because of the energy and passion the people here have for this school. I wanted to be surrounded by people who would make me excited to learn, and that is exactly what I have experienced.

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

Not at all. When I first came, I had set my life on a course based on what I perceived others wanted me to do — never giving a thought to if that life was one I wanted to live.

It took me a long time to realize that success is subjective, and my definition of success is different from those around me. It took me even longer to realize that is okay. I am proud to say I am not where the freshman-year me thought I would be.

Who helped you get to where you are now?

There are so many wonderful people I have met at Augie, but there are three who I would specifically like to thank:

Since my first day of classes freshman year, Matthew Fockler helped foster my love for geography and opened my eyes to the beautiful and chaotic interconnectivity of the world. He helped me realize it’s okay, in fact normal, to not know what you are doing with your life, and it’s never too late to change your path.

My advisor and mentor Jenny Arkle has become someone I look up to the most. Since my first day working with her, she has created an environment where I feel comfortable failing, which in return helped me grow more confident in myself and my skills than I ever thought possible.

My best friend Michelle Quinn has been with me through my best and worst times and never stopped supporting me. She is truly the best person I could have ever asked to meet.

I would not be who I am today without the support from these amazing people.

Peak experience?

The summer after my freshman year I took a trip to Colorado with the geography department. To this day, it is my favorite college experience. It was the first time I realized the influence my classes had on the way I saw the world.

As we traveled through different cities and landscapes, I saw more than buildings, mountains and streams. It was a story: convergence of tectonic plates, rivers carving our new landscapes, people migrating and changes the earth around them.

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What surprised you?

I never thought I would feel so at home surrounded by strangers. Don't get me wrong — you end up getting to know people really quickly on campus, but there are still so many people I have not met. Regardless, I never expected I would still feel part of a community even when I don't know anyone around me. Augie has a certain welcoming vibe that makes you feel comfortable.

How did you use Augie Choice?

I was lucky enough to use my Augie Choice to travel to the Caribbean island of Bonaire with the geology department. The trip revolved around understanding how the island formed, which we observed through snorkeling, scuba diving and hiking up mountains. And, of course, it was breathtakingly beautiful!

What will you miss the most?

Hammocking in the Quad in the afternoon. It is the perfect combination of peaceful and lively, seeing everyone walk to and from classes. I'm going to miss the joy I feel when I would see friends I hadn't seen in a while walk past, the smell of the lilac bushes that bloom in the spring, and the way the computer lab chairs in Swenson always creak when you sit in them.

I'm going to miss the little things that have made Augie feel like home.

Advice for the Class of 2026?

Do not let other people's definition of success define your own. College environments can sometimes seem competitive, and you may feel pressured to pursue a certain path to live up to others' expectations. Take your time these next four years to discover what makes you happy and fulfilled.