



Robert Burke

High school: Johnsburg High School

Hometown: Johnsburg, Ill.

Majors: Geography, sociology

Minor: Political science

Activities: Augustana Choir, Geography Club, Bike Club, Sustained Dialogue, Climate Change Task Force, Zeta Phi Kappa sorority, Mortar Board, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Gamma Epsilon (earth sciences)

Internships: Planning intern at Renew Moline

Post-grad plans: Volunteering with Green Iowa AmeriCorps

“Robert is not only an outstanding student, but he has also made Augustana—and the Quad Cities—a better place. Robert embodies a liberal arts education, using his majors to dive enthusiastically into theoretical debates about place, power and justice while simultaneously learning through experiences with local communities. From coordinating GIS projects at the Upper Mississippi Center to becoming a key voice on environmental activism on campus, working on urban revitalization projects at Renew Moline, and writing a terrific SI on the construction of LGTBQ+ communities in the Quad Cities, Robert is a model for the kind of engaged student we hope to have at Augustana. I can’t wait to see what he’ll do next!”
— Dr. Chris Strunk, associate professor, geography

MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2020

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

Why Augustana?

I came to Augustana on a whim! I trusted my instincts that this would be a good place for me to grow, and it was! I liked that you can come with nothing but curiosity and still find your way. There is an atmosphere here that allows you to carve your own path very quickly while making lasting connections. I am very thankful it worked out!

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

I didn’t have a clear vision of where I thought I might end up, but that didn’t worry me. In fact, I embraced it. I knew I wasn’t alone: I was in a boat full of people like me, and we climbed up the (many) stairs together. Along the way, you discover what it is that you bring to the table and what your purpose is in this community. I quickly found myself involved in a number of activities that formed that sense of identity, and I am very happy with where that strong footing has brought me.

Who helped you get to where you are now?

Everyone you meet shapes you in some way. Every shared experience is a point of connection that gets you closer to where you want to be. Figuring things out together is what makes long-lasting memories and influential relationships.

A lot of people talk about the importance of faculty connections, and they certainly are important. These are the people who help you find your niche both in and out of the classroom. It’s connections with professors that helped me discover what my academic and career interests were. They push you, but it’s for your own good!

I also deeply value connections with my peers and friends that I met here. They, too, shape you and keep you on track! There is never a dull moment when you surround yourself with people who are full of energy, wisdom and passion.

Peak experience?

I went on strike for the environment with about 400 other members of the Augustana community last September. I believe that knowledge is a privilege, and that each of us is obligated to act when we see injustice. The experience and its impact gave me an idea of what I am capable of and what I enjoy fighting for.

What surprised you?

I was surprised by how quickly I felt at home and how quickly I found my path. Like I said, I came to college with no plan and am very happy that things fell into place. I knew from day one that the people I met here would change my life for the better, and they have!

How did you use Augie Choice?

I toured Europe with the Augustana Choir for three weeks in the summer of 2018. We shared our music in Spain, France and Sweden.

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What will you miss the most?

The atmosphere that begs you to be yourself! Somewhere along the way I realized how happy I was to be in an environment that let me get my hands on whatever I wanted and take off. This is the place that shows you who you are, and that it's more than okay to take that and run. It's a home where I belong and always will.

Advice for the Class of 2024?

Be you, and don't let your days fly by. Get out and about and start exploring whatever strikes you. You might just stumble upon your dream, and when you do, don't be afraid to chase it. You'll quickly find yourself surrounded by people who are happy you're happy, and happy you're here.