



## Irene Mekus

**Majors:** Geography and public health

**Minor:** Anthropology

**Activities:** Augustana Student Medical Reserve Corps (educates the campus about disaster preparedness and certifies student volunteers), part of Augustana Community Health Outreach Organization (ACHOO)

**Internships:** Augie Acres, Rock Island County Health Department, City of Silvis' Main Street Program

**Post-grad plans:** Looking for a community-oriented job in the Quad-City area that combines my public health and geography majors, possibly in city government

“A native of East Moline, Irene has applied her interests in public health and geography to an impressive array of community-based research projects. In addition to producing an original history of Greek migration to the Quad Cities and an interdisciplinary analysis of barriers to healthy food access for low-income families in Rock Island, she helped set up a farmers' market in Silvis and implemented a marketing plan for Augie Acres. Irene exemplifies the kind of critical thinking and commitment to social justice needed to tackle problems in our communities.”

— Dr. Chris Strunk, assistant professor, geography

## MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2017

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

### Why Augustana?

Augustana was a great school in my own backyard! I could commute and still get a quality education on a small campus and be involved in my own community.

### Are you where you thought you'd be four years ago?

Not at all...I had no idea back then. I changed my major, took a lot of interesting classes and learned a lot of great things along the way.

### Who helped you get to where you are now?

In my freshman year, I took Dr. Carrie Hough's Medical Anthropology class on a whim, and it really inspired me! She was the first one to tell me about the public health major. My first two public health classes were geography classes, one of which was Dr. Chris Strunk's GEOG 325 Urban Design and Sustainable Cities. It was so interesting to learn about city design and city spaces that I knew it was something I wanted to study. Thus, I added a geography major.

### A peak experience?

My peak experience was participating in the Women's March on Washington on Jan. 21, 2017. The Women's and Gender Studies Department sponsored a bus, and we drove through the night to get there. It was a powerful experience, and I couldn't have been prouder to be there in D.C. in that moment! I will never forget the experience. It renewed hope and intensified my commitment to my own personal values. The quote by Edmund Burke, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing” continues to resonate with me as I continue to reflect upon my experience at the march. Women's rights are human rights, and if you don't stand up for your rights, they can be taken away.

### What surprised you?

I learned that I love learning about people and seeing how cultures and communities interact with one another.

### How did you use Augie Choice?

I used Augie Choice for an internship with the City of Silvis' Main Street program.

### What will you miss the most?

I am going to miss the professors the most—Dr. Strunk, Dr. Hough, Dr. Kaul and Dr. Wegman-Geedey are amazing mentors and educators! They helped shape my journey and helped me be where I am today. Learning something new every day and going on class adventures in the Quad Cities is something I am definitely going to miss!

### Advice for the Class of 2021?

Take a geography or anthropology class. Don't be afraid to take a class that might seem intimidating at first. Also intern...if you can't find the internship you are looking for, get to know people in the field and you might be able to work with them to create one.