



As an international student (from Albania) in US it has not always been easy for me. I moved here 5 years ago to attend the last year of high school in Washington State. As an exchange student, it was my first time in United States living with an American family. When I started school I was a little intimidated since my language was not perfect. I would study a lot, stay up very late to finish up my assignment and study for SAT in order to go to college. All this effort paid off since I was the only international student in that year graduating with a diploma and honors. After I graduated high school, I moved to Valdosta State University on an Out of State Waiver, which covers the out of state portion of my tuition, making it possible for me to attend college in USA. The Out of State Waiver is very competitive and it is always based on your previous semester's GPA. Attending college and living on my own has helped me grow up, take on more responsibilities and taught me how to deal with life circumstances better. Upon starting college, I had to deal with a roommate that stole from me as well as other people. She got arrested and charged later on, but I still had to take care of the house, go to school while

trying to recover the financial loss and deal with police paperwork and questionnaires. Despite the tough beginning, I was still able to do well in my first year and be placed on the Dean's List. My freshman year I used to be a pre-med major and also I won a second place in the Periodic Puzzle Competition (this was an International Event that corresponded with the International Year of Chemistry), where I was the president of my group at that time. In my sophomore year I developed an interest in business, which combined with the high cost of medical school, led me to change my major to Finance and International Business. I am hoping in the next few years to be able to have a dual master's degree, MBA and MHA, which would make it possible for me to work in the healthcare industry. I am graduating with honors with my International Business degree this December and in spring 2014 with my finance degree. My current GPA as of Summer 2013 is 3.71.

I am a very outgoing person and I like meeting new people, especially students that are very motivated and talented. I think being around these types of people makes you feel you are not alone and provides you with support. I am a member of few honors societies including VSU societies and national ones such as Golden Key, Alpha Phi. This spring I got to be part of the business honor society Beta Gamma Sigma, which recognizes the top 10% of business students. One of the benefits about being at Valdosta State is that it gives you the opportunity to be active in student organizations. At the beginning, I was a little intimidated in participating in organization activities. One of my friends at Golden Key encouraged me to apply for the Vice-President of Golden Key Honor Society. I was so excited when I got elected to serve and this year I applied for the President position. Currently I am the president for our chapter and

-serving as a vice-president has helped me know our chapter weakness and the ways to improve them.

A major step in my career in business was being able to do an internship. I interned for eight months with EXIT In Touch Realty, a real estate company in Valdosta. My duties consisted in developing a marketing strategy, submitting sales information, updating the list of properties and sending promotional offers to buyers and renters. I enjoyed working there and I strongly recommend anybody to do at least an internship while they are in college, for the experience one gets it is valuable and it helps build business skills. I want to give special thanks to the career strategies center (Located in North Campus), especially Miss Page, who matched me with the internship and help me build my cover letter and resume. Besides going to school full time, doing an internship, being part of student organizations, I have worked part time at Media Center, Odum Library. During this two and a half year I have been working there, media has been like a family for me. I want to thank Rex Devane and Bradley Cupp, for being understandable and working around my school schedule so I don't have to miss classes.

I want to thank some of the people that have helped me and encourage me while going to VSU:

- The Neumayer family for offering support and help when I moved to US and being a family for me by giving me advice and helping me out with the VSU admission packet.
- My family back home in Albania, my father Petrika Shalësi, my mother Maria Shalësi and my sister Eva Shalësi; for being supportive of me while I studied abroad.
- John, THE U CAN! MAN - I meet John in my world literature class when we had a group project together. I talked to John and since that day we have communicated on regular

basis. I am glad to know him; he is very uplifting, positive and an inspirational person. I want to congratulate John, on this book and also his degree from VSU.

- Valdosta State University for welcoming international students like me and making it possible through the out of state waiver for me to attend college in US.
- Lauren Braun (International Advisor), for helping with the visa paperwork's, offering advice and help.
- My friends especially Marhabo Kasimova for listening to me and being a great friend.
- Dr. Hinton (political science) - Dr. Hinton used to say to us before the test "The tests should not cause you anxiety; they are more like an opportunity to earn a good grade"
- Dr. Scott Manley (Management Professor) - One of the most inspirational teachers I have had at VSU.
- Dr. Kuhlmeier (Marketing Professor); Dr. Aktas (Finance advisor); Dr. Heath (Economics Professor); Dr. Williams (English Professor) and also many of the professors I haven't mentioned above.
- Honor Societies such as Golden Key, International Dean's List Society for offering me scholarships while attending college.

Some of the advices I would give to upcoming VSU undergraduates both for US and International Students:

1. College offers great opportunities for networking; hence join organizations on campus and be active in at least one of them. You would be surprised of how much you can benefit from them, starting from scholarships, summits and job opportunities.

2. Most of the student change majors at least once or twice. I used to be a pre- med (chemistry) major and I changed my major to business administration. It is important to find something you are interested in it.
3. The standard four year for a degree, it is longer than four years. When I started VSU in Fall of 2009, I thought I was going to graduate in Summer of 2013. Things change when I decided to double major and work part time. However, I don't regret taking a little longer to graduate, since I am more prepared for the workforce.
4. Get out of your comfort zone. Initiate more projects, be the leader in your group whether it is a study group or organization.
5. Don't be shy; Talk to students that are different than you. You will be surprised how much you can learn from them.
6. Internships are important; they are the only way you can know if you like a job without being committed to it for a longer period of time.

