

# A first-generation student achieves his dream of leading the student government

Ralph Williams' Story | September 29, 2016 in Higher Education, Success Stories

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"I was elected student government president in April," said Ralph Williams, a senior at Kentucky State University and a first-generation college student. "Freshman year, I told my dad, 'When I'm older, that's what I want to do.' And he said, 'Go for it.' So it was a very special moment when you say that you want to do something and it finally happens."

Though he's only been serving for a short time, Ralph is already busy. One of his duties is to help students with any issues or questions—concerning topics ranging from directions to classes to new programs the college is rolling out. One such program is the free e-textbook program that the college started this year in partnership with Pearson. The program provides every student with access to all required textbooks in the form of e-books. Ralph has been helping students learn about the program and even appeared on the local news.

He said, "I was really excited when I learned that there would be a program to assist students with textbook costs because we all know that college costs are continuing to increase while aid for college is decreasing." Ralph has been providing education to students and explaining to them that though they will see a charge on their bill for the e-textbooks, the college will actually be covering the full cost.

Although Ralph said he tends to be partial to paper books that he can hold in his hands, he's impressed by the features of the e-textbook program. "There are a lot of cool things you can do. You can highlight things. You can zoom in and zoom out. There's an app you can get for your phone or tablet. And there's a way to download the book so you can read it even when you don't have Internet access."

As a representative of the student body, Ralph has learned to communicate effectively not only with students, but also with the executive office and the Board of Regents, on which he serves as a voting member. "It's a big responsibility. A lot of people come to me for help, whether it's a student, a faculty member, staff member, or someone from the president's cabinet. I've definitely learned the importance of being professional, working together, and building good relationships."

These experiences have taught Ralph not to underestimate himself. "I would never have thought that I would be able to do these things," he said, referring to his expectations prior to college. Yet he has always been driven to succeed, something his parents encouraged. "Neither my father nor my mother has a college degree. But they've been very successful. Though they didn't have the chance to attend college, they've always stressed the importance of academics to my sister and me. They've always made sure that we did the best that we could in school."

Ralph plans on continuing his education after graduation by earning a master's in business administration and possibly a doctorate. Given his leadership, customer service, and public speaking skills, it's no surprise that he has other ambitious plans for his future: "Later down the road, I would really like to run for public office, either for Congress or in some other capacity."

Tags: Kentucky, Learner Product Stories

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