

# Kelsey Nicholson



Kelsey Nicholson's University of New Hampshire story begins with what she likes to call a "UNH Miracle." As a high school junior living in the south shore of Massachusetts, Kelsey ('17) watched most of her friends commit to nearby schools and assumed she would stay close to home as well. That notion changed on the memorable day of her UNH campus tour. Kelsey's mom's car broke down in A-Lot right as the duo arrived on campus. This twist of fate led to Kelsey touring campus alone. As she explored UNH for the first time, she thought about some advice a friend had given her that "touring colleges is like trying on a wedding dress- you'll know the right one as soon as you try it on". At the time Kelsey was sad her mom couldn't come on the tour but looking back she realizes that "it was the best experience ever because I felt like it was just me and this campus. And it was a true love story."

Through a combination of passion, service, and a few more of those classic "UNH Miracles," Kelsey is graduating this spring with a UNH story to be proud of. One nominator writes, "Kelsey is an outstanding student leader, but she is even more a human being of exceptional quality, gifts and aptitude." Kelsey did not always realize her potential as a leader. She immediately fell in love with the energy and community of UNH but was still overwhelmed by the bigness of campus. She viewed herself as an average student and she never wanted to stand out. She remembers thinking, "I was OK with just being another number and getting my school work done. Basically I never thought of myself as a leader." She was shocked when her RA pushed her to apply for a summer Orientation Leader (OL) position- she couldn't believe someone thought she could be good at a job that had the word "leader" in the title. She hesitantly applied and even after receiving a position feared that she was under-qualified for the role. Kelsey didn't know at the time was that working for the orientation program would be the catalyst for a transformation in how she viewed the UNH community as well as herself.

For Kelsey, that first week of orientation leader training was a "rebirth." Through learning how to welcome and guide incoming first year students, Kelsey also learned she could use qualities like her shyness and humility to connect to others. Kelsey thrived as an OL. She was selected in 2015 as a returning OL and in 2016 earned one of the two competitive "senior staff" positions. The confidence she built led to so much more. Kelsey tried out for the campus hip hop dance organization Sisters in Step and put her 16 years of dance experience to use by becoming one of the choreographers for the team. Attending Leadership Camp was another momentum-building experience. Kelsey remembers, "There's just something about being isolated in the woods with a group of people that want to make change in the world that makes you feel like you can actually go out and do it."

To know Kelsey is to know that changing the world is what she is going to do. Kelsey shines academically as a dual major in Women Studies and History with a minor in Middle Eastern Studies. Kelsey believes history is tied to the future through principles of service, activism, and social justice, which have defined her college experience. She is a beloved volunteer at the Waysmeet Center where she recently took on organizing hundreds of holiday food baskets for local families. She has also served as a research intern at the Freedom Café and a member of She's the First, an organization dedicated to assisting women of lower socioeconomic status in pursuing their college educations. Kelsey is also a brother of the UNH chapter of co-ed community service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega (APO). She has challenged herself to take on leadership roles starting with corresponding secretary then the service chair and a successful term as president. Thanks in large part to Kelsey's leadership, APO was named the UNH Community Service Organization of the year and was recognized with a Spirit of NH award as Outstanding Educational Service Organization by Volunteer NH in 2016.

Kelsey is now a leader who encourages younger students to believe in themselves and shine. In her time at UNH, Kelsey has not only stopped underestimating herself, she has started helping others believe in their own ability to create change.

Kelsey advises future students to fully submerge themselves in the UNH experience. "There will be so many opportunities to take advantage of while you're here, whether that's leadership programs, jobs, internships, academic experience, professional experience. All these things that you can take advantage of, so just don't be afraid to soak it in. The opportunities are just endless." Post-graduation, Kelsey will move to Detroit, Michigan to serve with AmeriCorps. While she doesn't know exactly where she will be in five years, she knows her priorities will be the same as they have been during her time as a UNH Wildcat. As Kelsey states: "Sometimes people say you have to choose between a high paying job or other things and doing service. For me, it's not hard to choose because serving however you can is just the route to go".