

UWO experiences pave way for engaged FFA leader

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Joanna Wavrunek will travel 280 days over the next year, all for a great cause.

Wavrunek, a FFA State Officer and on-hiatus University of Wisconsin Oshkosh student, is hitting the road to help spread the word about an organization close to her heart. She'll serve as the State FFA Reporter for Section 9, a leadership position that represents the interests of about 19,000 FFA members.

During the next year, Wavrunek will travel to more than 35 high schools. She'll participate in conferences and workshops. And, most importantly, she'll help build stronger leaders and teach goal-setting and teamwork all in hopes of developing today's youth for an organization with a mission "dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education."

"Words cannot even describe how excited I am for this year," she said. "This summer has been preparing us for the busy school year and for the mission that will begin shortly. I am extremely excited to work with a variety of stakeholders, FFA members, teachers, advisers, sponsors, parents and FFA alumni."

Taking a year off of college wasn't an easy choice for Wavrunek, but she does believe it was the right one. FFA has been a part of Wavrunek's life since she was in 7th grade and she views the opportunity as her chance to give back.

"This position will benefit me in tremendous ways. I will become a stronger leader and also improve on my public speaking and media skills," said Wavrunek, who intends to return to UW Oshkosh in fall of 2013 after her year with FFA and major in radio-TV-film and communication.

"This is a very big commitment, but when I look back to what FFA has done for me and how it has developed me into the person I am today, I feel like I am just returning the favor."

Even though short so far, Wavrunek believes her time as a college student at UW Oshkosh prepped her for her FFA leadership opportunity.

"Getting one year of college under my belt was the best decision I made because it made me a more independent person and forced me to do things more on my own," said Wavrunek, originally from Denmark, Wis. "Spending a year in Oshkosh was a big change for me because I am used to a small town and the country."

Interesting, however, is Wavrunek is the only one of the 11 state officers who was born and raised on a farm, she said.

"This just shows that FFA is not just about farming," she said.

Instead, FFA's national motto is hinged on learning and growth. The organization, which was previously called Future Farmers of America, dropped the name in 1988.

"It really makes me emotional, in a happy way, to think about how many people and students I will benefit within a year of service," Wavrunek said.

Learn more:

- [Wisconsin Association of FFA](#)
- [National FFA](#)