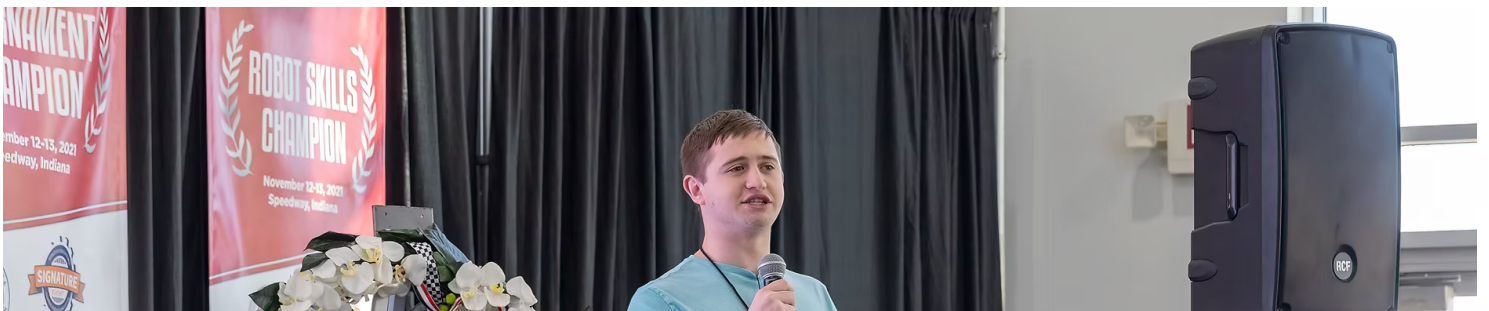




David Wolfe Bender · Dec 16, 2021 · 12 min read

## Another Year in Review: 2021, A New Era



At some points, 2021 felt as if it were a new era. 2020 presented craziness; 2021 presented something new. New challenges. New ideas. New outlooks. But most notably, new opportunities.

As we approach the end of this year, we look for ways to remember it. Google gives us their "Year in Search." Spotify wraps up our year in music and Apple Music gives us a "replay" playlist with the year's most-popular songs (we'll get to that later...). TIME Magazine features the year's most-newsworthy person in a special edition of their publication.

I have my own way of remembering the year. In what has become a yearly tradition, I look back at *my* year and try to extrapolate some lesson or theme of what these 12 months have taught me or what they meant to me. I strive to answer these questions: how will I remember this year? What were this year's best moments? How did I grow this past year?

This year's lesson is best taught in a story.

Last year, I didn't get to attend any of Indiana University's sporting events. This year, however, I've made a concerted effort to get involved in IU athletics. For example, a group of friends and I try and go to every single IU Women's Basketball home game. I'm not really a basketball fan, and I rarely watched basketball games before this year, so it's been fun watching for what feels like the first time.

In basketball, every single possession counts. One possession can change the course of the game, meaning every possession is an opportunity. And every game can change the course of the season. And *that* leads into this year's lesson.

**Each year presents a limited number of new opportunities. When the opportunity presents itself, take it. Make the most of it. Because you don't know when the next one will come along.**

When 2021 started, COVID-19 was still at the forefront of everyone's mind. The United States did not yet have a widespread vaccine. I was still stuck in my dorm – studying for virtual classes – for most of the day. But throughout the year – and especially after the vaccine was distributed widely – more opportunities opened up. I went to extreme lengths to move outside of my comfort zone this year, to make the most every opportunity.

### Courses

I chose a diverse slate of courses this year. I took a science course on climate change, for example. (Science, by the way, is historically not my thing). Nevertheless, I learned quite a bit from the course. I never would've thought I would've liked it, but I jumped right in, and it ended up being a very beneficial course.

My favourite course this past Fall was "Research and Planning for Public Relations." I honestly never would've thought it would've become one of the most helpful courses so far in my university career. (By the way, that course culminated in a 63-page final paper analyzing the proper public relations strategies for a major car company.).

Diving into every course – regardless of how I thought I'd like it originally – made me realize how much one can learn when they are outside of their comfort zone.

### Books

Another thing I learned this year was the strength of books. I haven't always been the most prolific reader; I'd reach for a newspaper or click on an online article before I'd *ever* consider turning the page on an actual book. *Books can be a real tool for learning, and yet they are often underestimated.*

Now, to be honest: I didn't read every book in full. I'd pick one up, read a chapter, put it down, and pick something up again the next day. I've started creating a personal library in my apartment. Here are just a few of the 25+ books included in that personal library:

- Armies of Sand: The Past, Present, and Future of Arab Military Effectiveness (Kenneth M. Pollack)
- The Manager: Inside the Minds of Football's Leaders (Mike Carson)
- Start-up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle (Dan Senor and Saul Singer)
- Uncontrolled Spread: Why COVID-19 Crushed Us and How We Can Defeat the Next Pandemic (Scott Gottlieb, MD)
- How America's Political Parties Change (and How They Don't) (Michael Barone)

Most of the books in my library revolve around politics, history, political science, economics, and policy. And I think those topics reveal what books are great for: exposing yourself to views that might differ from your own. I don't agree with the positions supported in all of the books in my new library, but they are great tools for learning.

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**This year, of course, created new challenges. More opportunities lead to more difficulties. But I choose to focus on what made this a *good* year. So here are some of the moments in 2021 that I'll never forget:**

## January 13: My First Bloomington City Council Story

During the Spring 2021 semester, I covered city government and politics for the Indiana Daily Student, IU's award-winning, independent student newspaper. That was a phenomenal



opportunity, and it was a privilege to work for such an incredible newspaper. The core of my reporting revolved around Bloomington's City Council.

We often underestimate city councils in this country; we don't talk about local issues enough. Throughout the semester, I covered more than 20 of these meetings. What I learned is just what we'd all expect: local government holds a significant influence over our daily lives, and we need to pay more attention to local issues.



## February 17: Small Snowpocalypse in Bloomington

Major snow hit Bloomington hard in February. When snow falls, most cities and universities probably focus on clearing snow off the major roadways. IU instead chose to plow as much snow as possible up against the back of my car. I expressed my displeasure by taking a shovel and putting the snow back in the middle of the parking lot. It took me 45 minutes, but I got my car out. (IU's facilities team wasn't as impressed by or happy with my shoveling skills).

## March 3: the Infamous Nine-Hour City Council Meeting

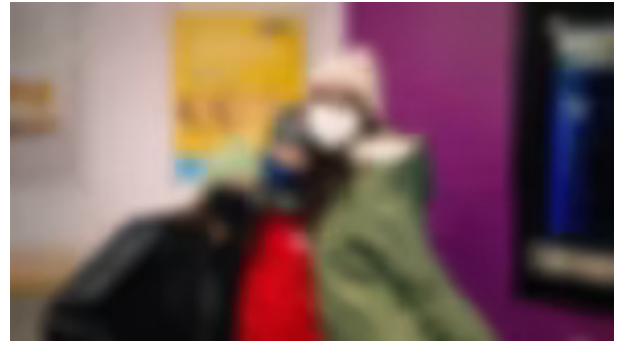
The title basically explains the situation. The meeting started at 6:30 PM, and it lasted for nine full hours. It was the longest city council meeting since at least 2004. My story from the meeting published at almost 4:00 AM EST. You can read it [here](#). That was one hell of a night for me and my editors, who were hoping to get to bed by 11:00 PM.

**Sidenote:** That meeting was so controversial that the city council [passed legislation](#) two months ago to ensure meetings cannot last beyond midnight. So no future city reporter will ever have to go through the pain of sitting in front of a computer screen at 3:30 AM writing about the Bloomington City Council, it seems. They're just lucky, I guess.

## March

## 18: Friends and Insomnia Cookies

COVID-19 obviously made it hard to see friends. I also didn't return to IU's campus in the Spring semester until mid-February. So my first time *really* getting to be with friends this year was when Sara Kress and Alex Hardgrave (my editors from the prior semester) invited me over to their house. And then Alex, Sara, Ally Melnik (another friend), and I celebrated the opening of Bloomington's new Insomnia Cookies location by walking there in the 37 degree weather.



Me, with Sara Kress (left) and Ally Melnik (right) at Insomnia Cookies

## April 1: Vaccinated

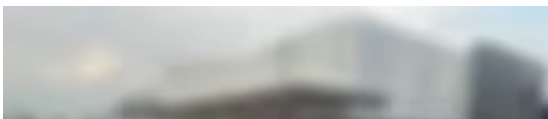
I got vaccinated at my first available opportunity. In fact, because all of the Bloomington-area pharmacies were all booked with appointments, I drove almost an hour to get that vaccine. It was totally worth it. I received the Johnson&Johnson one-shot vaccine, and then I got boosted later in 2021 with the Moderna vaccine.

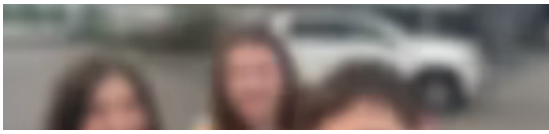
As I've written before – on and off of my blog – I believe we owe a great debt of gratitude to the scientists at the three major companies that developed the COVID-19 vaccines. We also owe tremendous appreciation to the various public officials in the Trump and Biden administrations, who were involved in either the development process or the distribution process. This vaccine is not political discussion; it is a medical one for you and your doctor. You can get your vaccine [here](#).

## June 12: Post-Semester Shake Shack

Big news: an Indianapolis suburb now has a Shake Shack. Exciting! Two of my friends (and editors from the Fall 2021 semester) and I went to Shake Shack.

Cate Charron and Helen Rummel are two of the many reasons why I love working for the newspaper at Indiana University. They have made me a better leader, editor, and writer; I am so thankful for their friendship.





Me, with Helen Rummel (left) and Cate Charron (right), two of my editors for the Fall 2021 semester

## June 13: Visiting the Government Accountability Office

I started my internship with the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in early May; however, due to the pandemic, the internship was conducted remotely. However, on a trip to Washington DC – my hometown – I made sure to stop by their office and take some photos.

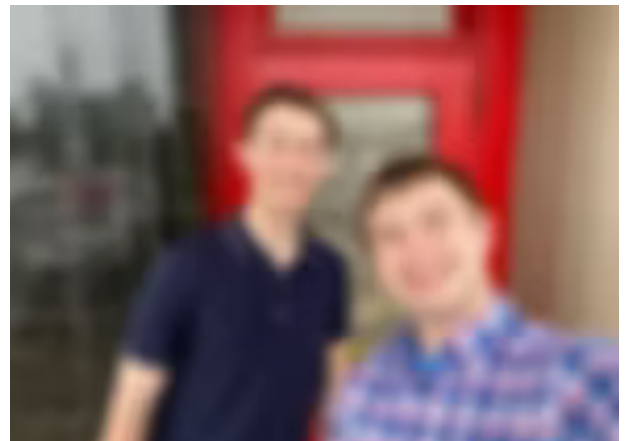
The GAO does some outstanding work, and yet it often goes unrecognized. I was so proud to work with such an extraordinary group of public servants. Click [here](#) to read more about my reflection of the internship as a whole. I am thrilled with the work I did at the GAO. You can find more of it on my [online portfolio](#).



## June 13: Peking Gourmet Inn

There's a Chinese food restaurant in northern Virginia that can only be described as the best in the country. Their specialty is Peking duck, a traditional Chinese dish that's somewhat rare in the United States. The restaurant was frequented by members of the Bush family and was often a common restaurant for politicians.

I've been telling Trace Held – a good friend from Park Tudor School – about this restaurant since 2017. The plan was always to go to the Peking Gourmet Inn if we were ever in DC together. After four years, we finally ended up in DC at the same time. I was there for a politics conference (more on that in a second), and Trace was interning in the United States Senate. So we went. Trace agreed: it's best Chinese food he's ever had, he said.



Me, with Trace Held (left) in front of the Peking Gourmet Inn

## June 14: AEI Summer Honors Program

Arunabh Sinha, a friend of mine from Park Tudor School, nominated me for a program in

Washington, DC. I submitted my application off hand. I didn't realize what an extraordinary opportunity it would be. The American Enterprise Institute is a DC-based think tank; unlike

most think tanks, the organization does not take institutional positions on issues. Rather, they gather academics, researchers, and policy experts to engage in our national discourse.



Me, with the students in my seminar

What makes AEI so appealing, however, is their commitment to student programs. One of those elite programs is the Summer Honors Program, a highly selective program that allows students to delve into one single issue in a seminar setting. My seminar, titled **The Constitution: Original Meanings and Modern Times** was taught by John Yoo, a law professor at the University of California's Berkeley campus. Professor Yoo is most notable (and controversial) for his work in President George W. Bush's Department of Justice.

The week was filled with incredible discourse, which is a perfect exemplar of what I loved about AEI: while the organization is traditionally seen as conservative, the views of the students in my seminar was incredibly diverse.

## June 22: Website Update

While I wasn't completing my internship with the Government Accountability Office, I was busy creating a whole new version of my website. After months of designing and redesigning, I finally came to a version I liked.

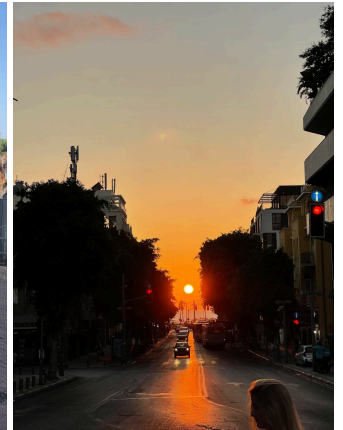
I changed some things, removed some things, and added some things. What changed? I added a new [online portfolio](#), complete with a new page about my internship with the [GAO](#) and a page about my [coursework at IU](#). My [CV page](#) also changed. Is there something I should add? I'd love to hear your feedback. [Contact me](#).

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In a somewhat last-minute move, I decided I would join a trip to Israel. I could not have imagined how much fun the trip would be when I originally signed up. I've wanted to go to Israel for my entire life, and even so, I was blown away by the country. American Jews have a special relationship with Israel; we're told and taught so much about this far-off place as we grow up, so much so that the country begins to feel like a home. And it felt like a home when I visited.

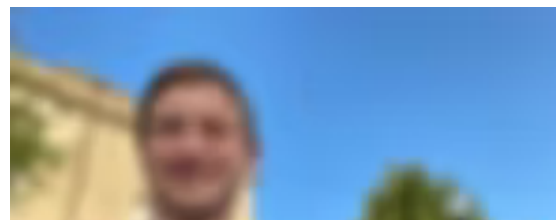
There were students on my trip from Indiana University, the University of Wisconsin's Madison and Milwaukee campuses, and the University of Oklahoma. I made some incredible friends on that trip, and I'm just so appreciative for that opportunity. I want to give a special thank you to the organizers at **IU Hillel** and **Hillel International** for making this trip happen. Specifically, I want to thank **Dalilah Bernier, Ben Novorr, and Rabbi Sue Laikin Silberberg** for their efforts both before the trip and on the trip.





## August 14: Moving Into My New Apartment

After months and months of waiting, my parents and I moved me into my new apartment, freshly furnished with furniture from IKEA. With many people continuing to work from home, it was very difficult to find IKEA furniture in stock. But we looked for what felt like every day, and eventually, we collected the various items. My apartment is just a five minute walk from campus (and the student newspaper's newsroom!), and I've loved it every day. I have attached a few photos of my new living space!

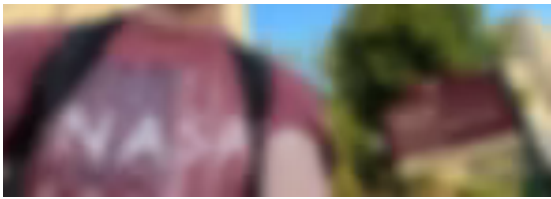


## August 23: First Day of 14th Grade!

I started my second year of university in 2021. I took 18 credit hours this past semester.







Me, in front of Franklin Hall, home of The Media School at Indiana University

great hosts and past semester, including courses in Hebrew, Public Relations Planning and Research, Politics in the Media, Constitutional Law, Communications Law, and Macroeconomics. Learn more [here](#).



This was a great semester, full of fun and excitement. Indiana University returned to full in-person instruction for the first time since March 2020; it was a great thing. It was just a great feeling to return to a classroom and really get to interact with classmates.

## October 2: AEI Fall Executive Council Summit

In October, I was given the opportunity to join the American Enterprise Institute's Executive Council at Indiana University. The council organizes and hosts events with prominent, nationally renowned speakers on IU's campus. As part of that program, I attended two conferences in the Fall semester with AEI. The first was in Washington DC. We heard from exceptional speakers across the two-day conference. Some examples included a panel on carbon tax policies and another social media regulation.

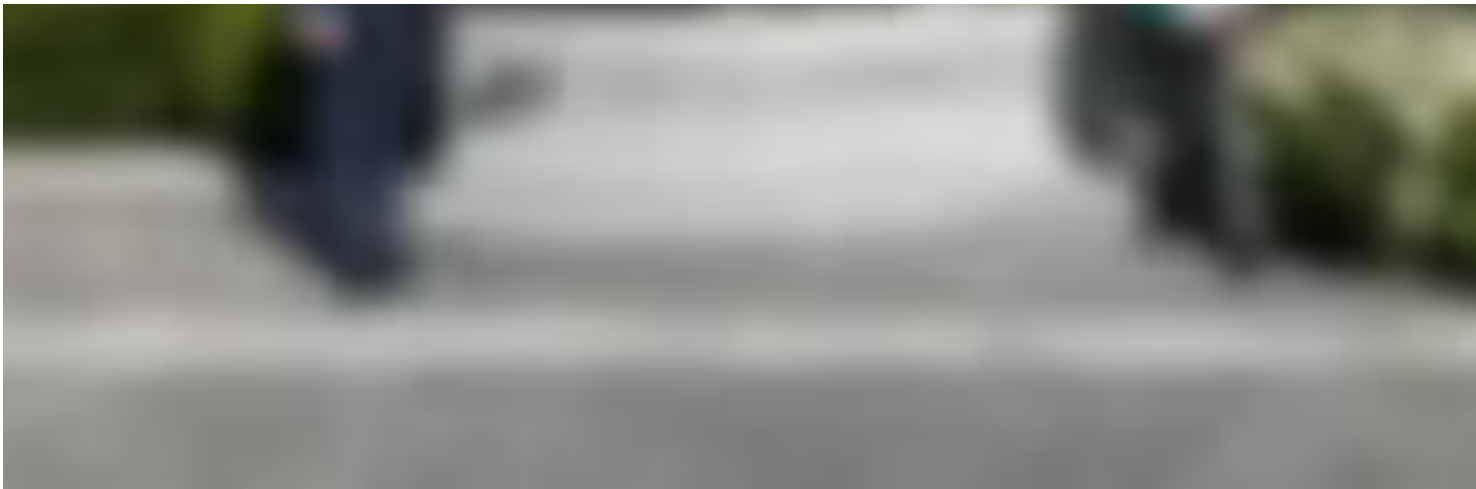
I attended both of these conferences with Arunabh Sinha – a close friend of mine from Park Tudor – who first introduced to me to AEI. But I met some new friends as well: IU students Garrett Wright and Agrayan Gupta, who both serve on the AEI Executive Council at IU, came on the trip. I also got to see Nidhi Krishnan, a friend from my AEI seminar over the summer.



## October 9: AEI National Student Conference on Hispanic Politics

The second conference was at Florida International University in Miami, FL. I met former U.S. Congressperson Carlos Curbelo, who discussed his work on environmental/climate change issues in Congress. Former Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen also gave a speech about her time in Congress.

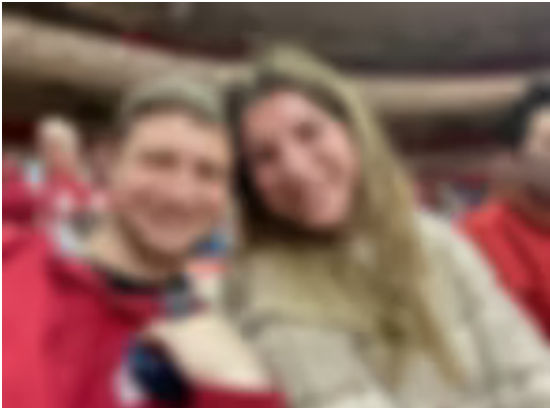




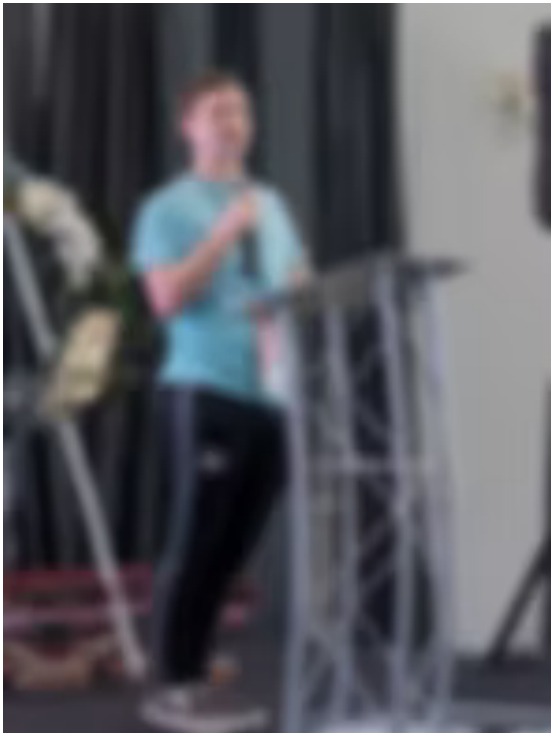
Me, with Nidhi Krishnan outside of the American Enterprise Institute headquarters in Washington DC

## November 5: First Time in Assembly Hall

Indiana University is famous for its basketball, particularly its stadium, Assembly Hall. As hard as this is for people to believe when I tell them: I didn't step foot into the facility until November this year. Many friends and I have committed to attend as many of the IU Women's Basketball team home games this year as possible. And this was their first game (or scrimmage) of the season. It was amazing.



Me, with my friend Cate Charron at Assembly Hall



Me, speaking at the Speedway: Tipping Point Signature Event

## November 12-13: Speedway Tipping Point Robotics Signature Event

Something else that came back this year? Big robotics events. And I had the opportunity to work with close friends Sheldon Phelps and Suzanne Phelps to host the greatest spectacle in robotics.

We last hosted this IndyCar-themed event in 2019; we were planning to host one in 2020, but it ended up getting canceled due to the pandemic. This year, however, we got to host a great event at the Dallara IndyCar Factory, one of the world's premier racing factories.

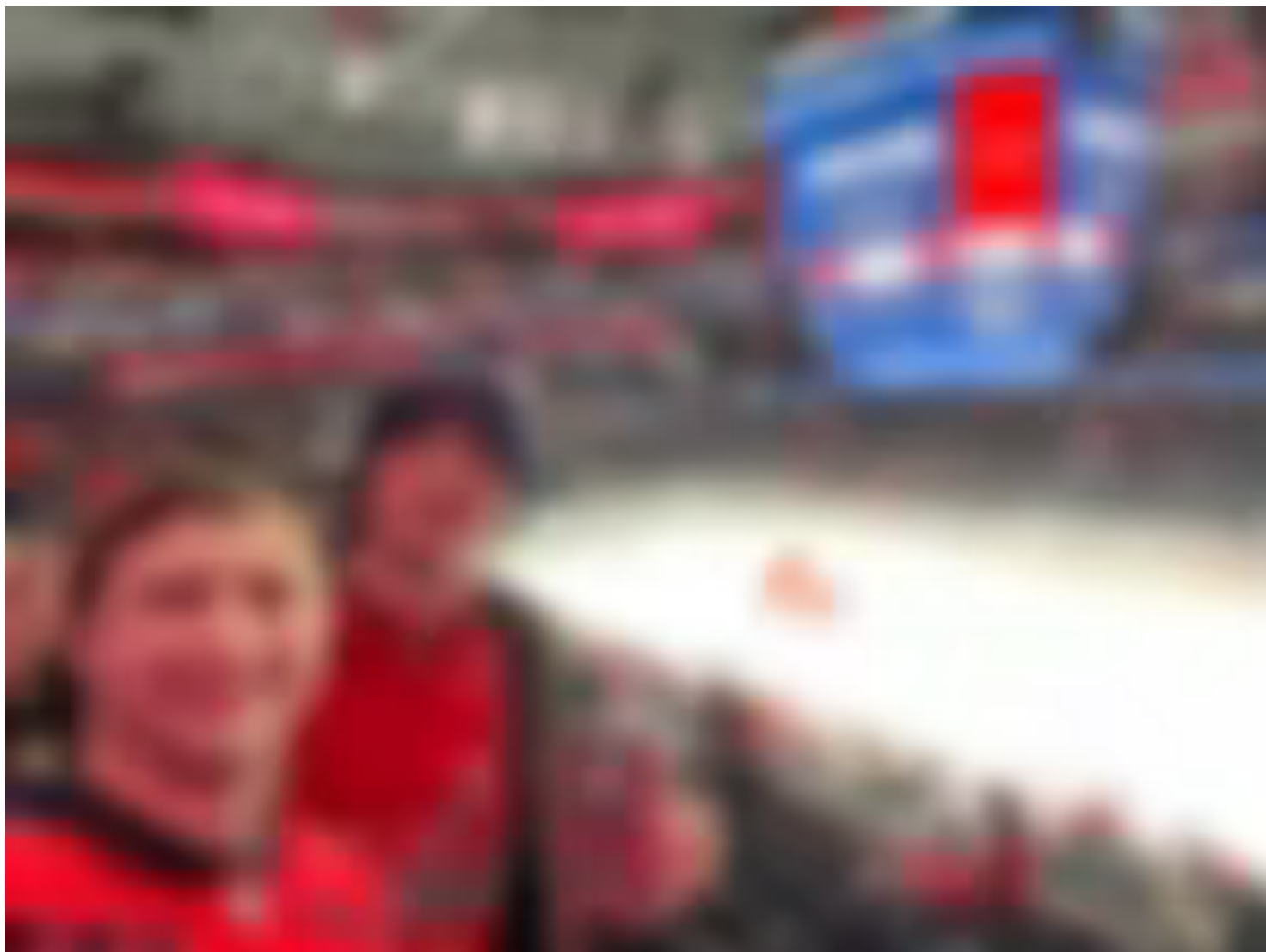
As part of the event, we got to crown some great teams as champions, three of which will go compete in Dallas, TX at the 2022 VEX Robotics World Championships.

Most importantly, it was a great opportunity to reconnect with robotics, which was a significant extra-curricular activity for me in school.

## November 24: Rocking the Red

My brother MJ and I have both been to countless Washington Capitals games at Capital One Arena over the years. But believe it or not, we had never actually been to one together, just the two of us. That changed November 24, 2021. It was an early Hanukkah gift, and it was the first time we've gone to a game in nearly five years. It was amazing.

It was also the first time we've been in the stadium since our favourite hockey team won the Stanley Cup in 2018 (so it was pretty great to see that banner in person).



Me, with my brother at Capital One Arena

## Other Ways to Recap My Year:

- I spent too much time listening to Taylor Swift music (just kidding, there's no such thing as "too much" Taylor Swift). Want specifics? I listened to 184 hours of Taylor Swift music (the two most common albums were the re-recordings of Fearless and Red). I also listened to 22 hours of AJR and 14 hours of Five Seconds of Summer.
- I wrote 69 stories for the Indiana Daily Student and edited dozens more. Some of my recent coverage included a series of hate symbols that popped up across Bloomington. Read more [here](#).
- I sent 8,100 tweets, a sharp decrease from the 22,100 sent in 2020.

## What's Next?

As always, who knows? Regardless of what happens, I hope to have some exciting news to share in the next few weeks and months. Here are some things I am very excited about for 2022:

- I have a new job! In the Spring semester, I will be serving as a **Managing Editor** for the **Indiana Daily Student**. I am ecstatic to continue serving for a newspaper I love at a university I adore. I've been serving as an Editor for our News division since August, and I'll miss the news desk (which has been my home as a reporter or editor since I first arrived at IU). My partner-in-crime as a Managing Editor will be **Luzane Draughon**, my *best friend* who also edited with me on the News Desk. I am SO excited. I want to express



arrived at 10:7. My partner in crime as a managing editor will be **Ezra Bragdon**, my best friend who also edited with me on the news desk. I am so excited. I want to express my appreciation to **Izzy Myszak** for putting her trust in me and offering me this opportunity.

- I am registered for *another* 18 credit hours at Indiana University in the Spring. My course selections will revolve around economics, civil rights/liberties, writing for public relations, and more!
- I am, once again, searching for internships for Summer 2022! I thoroughly enjoyed my work with the Government Accountability Office, so now I'm looking for a new role in the areas of public relations, media relations, communications, marketing, public affairs, or public strategy. Do you know a role I should be looking into? Tell me about it.
- I will still be listening to Taylor Swift music on repeat for hours on end. Everything Has (not) Changed, because my TS listening habits will never change (that's a Swift reference, so if you got the reference, there's a good chance we'll be good friends).
- I will still be tweeting a lot; sorry to those who were hoping I'd take a break. That will also probably never happen. Don't follow me yet? Follow me here.

## My Year, Just in Photos:





