



Ruth Nwatu

High school: Roger C. Sullivan High School

Hometown: Chicago, Ill.

Majors: Public health, neuroscience

Activities: Ladies of Vital Essence, African Student Association

Internships: Quad Cities Harm Reduction; Tikkun Olam Ministries

Post-grad plans: Pursue a career in substance abuse treatment

“Ruth has amazed me since her first day in my Intro to Public Health class years ago. Since then she has been able to blend her public health and neuroscience majors to address health disparities among those who struggle with addiction. Her lifesaving work with Quad Cities Harm Reduction demonstrates her commitment to helping others. We are so proud of Ruth and look forward to seeing how she continues to positively impact the world.”

— Dr. Lena Hann, assistant professor,
public health

MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2020

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

Why Augustana?

I chose Augustana because of the community atmosphere. The first time I visited Augie, everyone I interacted with was welcoming and seemed genuine. I liked the small class size and the student-to-faculty ratio. During my visit, I sat in to observe a psychology class and watched the way students were able to ask questions and engage in class discussions. At that moment, I knew that Augie was the perfect school for me.

Are you where you thought you'd be when you first came to campus?

These past four years have been a rollercoaster ride. I am not where I thought I would be when I first arrived. My ideology has changed tremendously. My perspective on life and the purpose of education and career have evolved. I came into Augie with a narrow mindset on what my life was going to be like. However, my journey has pushed me to challenge myself, and to say yes to life. I have grown as a person, a student and a future health professional.

Who helped you get to where you are now?

I would not be where I am today without my family, my friends, and our amazing students and faculty. I would also like to thank my public health advisor, Dr. Lena Hann, and my neuroscience advisor, Dr. Shara Stough. These people have supported me in various ways.

Dr. Hann was the reason I decided to major in public health. I loved her teaching style. She always challenged me to be my best self academically and personally. Dr. Stough has watched me grow over these past four years—from the moment I sat in her office during my first visit to Augie to the many occasions where I cried in her office about everything. She was always there to offer words of encouragement and support, which helped me in so many ways.

Peak experience?

My peak experience was interning at Quad Cities Harm Reduction. My internship opened my eyes to the struggles of substance abuse disorder and intensified my passion for substance abuse treatment advocacy. It was a very immersive and life-changing experience. I participated in community outreach and learned practical strategies that minimize the harm associated with drug use. I trained people to administer naloxone during an overdose emergency.

What surprised you?

The whole liberal arts experience was surprising to me. I truly enjoyed the humanity and society courses. The skills and knowledge I have acquired have strengthened my comprehension of societal issues and the power of education. Most important, the liberal arts experience taught me to question ideologies and not just take things at face value.

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How did you use Augie Choice?

I used my Augie Choice to study abroad in Guatemala for two weeks. It was a humbling experience and enabled me to be more aware of how we are all indirectly benefiting from child labor.

What will you miss the most?

I will miss sitting in the library and hanging out with friends while doing my assignments. I will also miss the safety net that a college environment provided. Lastly, I will miss my classmates and faculty members who have supported me throughout my journey here at Augie.

Advice for the Class of 2024?

Do not be afraid of failure. Your failures do not define you. We are often our own worst enemy because we get in our heads. I struggled for a long time because I did not have faith in myself. So, I urge you to have faith and trust the process. As long as you are seeking help and utilizing the resources available to you, the sky is truly the limit.