

Below goes above and beyond at UW Waukesha



Samantha Below racked up 49 college credits before beginning her freshman year at UW-Waukesha.

Professor Suzanne Joneson never suspected that Samantha Below was a high school student. She simply thought of her as one of the best students in her microbiology class at the [University of Wisconsin-Waukesha](#) [1].

In fact, it wasn't until the semester ended and Samantha asked for a recommendation letter that she learned the 18-year-old Waukesha native was a home-schooled high school senior.

"She was much more mature than many of her of-age colleagues," says Suzanne, an assistant professor of biological sciences.

Meanwhile, English lecturer Andrea Lochen found herself reading Samantha's first English 101 essay to her husband. Both marveled over her dialogue and metaphors in an essay about her mostly

unsuccessful attempts at learning to play the piano, specifically Chopin, from her grandfather.

“It was descriptive, funny and very poignant, and honestly, one of the best essays I’ve ever read by an undergraduate student,” Andrea recalls.

Samantha earned A’s in both classes and has an outstanding overall grade-point-average at UW-Waukesha. She entered the “Chopin’s Etude in A-flat Major” essay in the August Derleth Society’s annual creative writing contest for the UW Colleges and was a finalist. Samantha also was a first-place winner in the Southeast Wisconsin Festival of Book’s recent Century Fence Essay Contest for high school and middle school students.

By the end of summer 2012, Samantha had earned 49 college credits, including 27 credits from CLEP (college level examination program) exams. She was accepted into Carroll University’s nursing program, which she began in fall 2012 with the goal of becoming a nurse anesthetist.

Samantha, whose two older sisters also attended UW-Waukesha, says she decided to take college classes because she wanted to challenge herself in her senior year of high school. Besides English and biology, she took art and communications classes. She hasn’t found college classes too difficult so far, she says.

“The classes I have taken have always interested me, so I think that makes the work involved seem easier,” she says.

In addition to balancing her high school and college classes, Samantha finds time for music, soccer, volunteering and babysitting, as well as spending time with family and friends.

For other high school students who might want to take college classes, she advises: “Take classes that interest you and make sure you have enough time to study. If you know what you want to go to college for, take the hard classes and get them out of the way now so that later you don’t have to take several difficult classes at once.”

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