



Alma Pizano-Onofre

High school: Belvidere High School

Hometown: Belvidere, Ill.

Majors: French, psychology

Activities: Latinx Unidos, Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity, Delta Chi Theta sorority

Post-grad plans: I plan on taking a gap year to gain experience and then go to grad school to get my master's in higher education.

“I first met Alma in my 100-level French class. She was pretty quiet and, as a first-gen student, a little intimidated by her surroundings. She had no intention of continuing with French, but something clicked. Fast forward four years, and she is about to graduate. Alma got to this point through grit, determination and accepting that classes are tough and grades may not always be good, but she persevered. Her journey started with the belief that her family had in her and ended with the belief she has in herself. I am so proud of all that Alma has and will accomplish.”

— Gillian Lederman, assistant professor, French

MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2020

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

Why Augustana?

I'll be honest— Augustana was not my first choice. However, I had heard many good things about Augie so I did my research. After narrowing my choices, Augustana was the only school that I felt was at a reasonable distance from my home. I knew I would have the opportunity to be in a smaller school setting, smaller class sizes, and a small close-knit community. Plus, the financial aid package sealed the deal for me!

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

No. Not at all! The past four years have been a rollercoaster ride. I feel as though I came into Augie with a very dogmatic mindset of how things were meant to be. Now I feel as though my beliefs have changed excessively in terms of how I see the world and those around me. My experiences and encounters with people here at Augie have challenged me but have also helped me grow as a person. I guess that is how a liberal arts education works, so I guess Augustana had done its job.

Who helped you get to where you are now?

First and foremost, my family and boyfriend who love and support me. They will forever be my #1 fans and biggest supporters in my life. I will never be able to thank them enough for everything they have done for me.

My roommate Mayra has made Augustana feel like a home away from home. I am thankful for the countless memories and crazy adventures we have made! Thank you for being the sister I never had; these past four years would not have been the same without you, and I am so grateful Augustana brought you to me.

Thank you to all of the professors in the French Department who have encouraged me every step of the way. I would like to thank both Dr. Kiki Kosnick and Dr. Emily Cranford for being the most caring and genuine people I have met. Lastly, I would like to thank Professor Gillian Lederman for being the first person to show me genuine support at Augustana. She inspired and encouraged me in more ways than she could ever imagine, and for that, she has my entire respect.

Peak experience?

My peak experience was going to Dijon, France, for my study abroad trip. I think that my study abroad trip was one of the most eye-opening experiences I have ever had. In a way, I learned how to be more independent and not scared of new experiences. I allowed myself to learn how to give myself more credit for the things I know and the things I am capable of. Going to France gave me newfound confidence and appreciation for my forthcoming education.

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What surprised you?

What surprised me the most was learning how incredibly strong and resilient I am. The four years I have spent at Augustana have not been a walk in the park! My mom passed away at the beginning of my junior year, and I wasn't sure if I wanted to come back to Augie. However, I found the strength and was determined to finish what I started to get my diploma.

How did you use Augie Choice?

I used my Augie Choice toward my study abroad trip to Dijon, France! While I was in France, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the French culture as well as develop my linguistic abilities, thanks to my Augie Choice. I am grateful for the opportunities that I have received through Augustana.

What will you miss the most?

I can't encompass all the things I will miss in 500 characters, but I will try to summarize it as best as I can. The first thing I will miss is all the friends I have made throughout my four years here. The second thing is the French Department because they have been the most amazing, loving and supportive group of people I have ever met! Lastly, I will miss the sense of belonging I have acquired from being a student at Augie.

Advice for the Class of 2024?

Take advantage of every single opportunity Augustana has to offer and never take any moment for granted. The next four years will pass you by in the blink of an eye! Make the most out of them; not everyone gets the chance you have been given. Most importantly, have fun and enjoy the ride, kids.