

# AMARA AHMEN

## SCIENCE & HEALTH – RICKARDS HIGH SCHOOL

**Tell me a little about your background. Are you from Tallahassee?**

So, I came to Tallahassee when I was about 3 or 4 years old from Panama City. So I'm really interested in science, particularly in a career in the health field, and when I moved to Tallahassee I came to Maclay for elementary school, then Fairview middle school (the pre-IB program) and then Rickards High School for their IB program that I just graduated from.

**Let's talk a little about your schooling. What school did you attend and what activities/academics did you participate in?**

I'll start with academics, I recently graduated from Rickards with an IB diploma, that's the international baccalaureate program, I graduated as valedictorian, summa cum laude, 4.0 GPA, ranked #1 in the class.

**What is the next step in your academic career?**

I plan to go to FSU to pursue pre-medical studies.

**What inspired you to enter your field?**

So I think my work with patients as well as my work in other community service-oriented activities really inspired me to pursue this field. So for example, a really big activity I did in high school was science olympiad, so it's basically a series of science competitions in the form of lab procedures, or building devices, and written and practical exams. So I've won 13 medals in regional and state competitions, including events like disease detectives (so that's epidemiology, the study of how we prevent diseases), water quality, material science, dynamic planet, food science, and so those events involved a lot of studying or working as a team and notably I came in first place last year in the entire state for disease detectives. So science olympiad is one of those activities that motivated me to keep on pursuing science, because science is something that's constantly evolving, and I think it's important to bring that to other people, which is why as a member of science olympiad, I always worked to kind of motivate other students to keep on working, keep on studying, and try to encourage other students to join the club as well.

I also volunteered at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital, specifically in their intermediary care unit, and their orthopedic unit. So there I assisted nurses in answering patient requests for things like food, or ice water, recording vital signs, blood pressure, keeping note of appointments, and I think the most important experience I had there was being able to listen to other patients' stories, learning more about their difficulties in obtaining healthcare, and listening to their stories really motivated me to pursue medicine because there are so many patients in need who don't have access to healthcare.

I also volunteered with the Red Cross, I volunteered with the capillary chapter of the Red Cross, their summer kids days, kind of like a summer camp, so I worked as a camp counselor to help teach children about natural disasters, healthy diet, CPR, water safety, and then I brought that work to Rickards, because I wanted students at Rickards to get involved in the Red Cross. So I started the Rickards Red Cross club, so I was the founder and president of that, and I definitely plan to go back to my high school as an FSU student to mentor the students in that club.

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I was committee chair of finance one year, and then committee chair of membership for Key Club. So there I proposed fundraising projects to fund the service work that Key Club does, I also participated in lots of activities, like making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the homeless, toy drives for patients in the TMH pediatric unit, school cleanups,

Committee chair of membership - my role there was to promote membership and find ways to keep our members engaged in the club, and then also involved volunteering with the UNICEF Halloween project to raise funds for our neonatal tetanus project.

And then with the National Honor Society, I volunteered for numerous park cleanups, so for example we did AJ Henry park one year, I also volunteered with Big Bend Cares, to collect and organize food packages for homeless families, I helped to proctor the Rickard's Mu Alpha Theta math invitational, to encourage students to keep studying math.

I did a lot of gardening to beautify the school and to commemorate a really wonderful teacher who passed away last year. I was VP of the science national honor society.

I led this one really big activity with science national honor society called Siemens' Science Day at Cornerstone Elementary School, where we would all introduce STEM science activities to different grade levels of students, so we would do topics like paper chromatography, hovercrafts, to encourage them to pursue science-related fields.

A lot of the work I've done is outreach-based. And then I've also really appreciated the academic side of science/medicine, because I've also done research at the FSU College of Medicine biomedical science department, where I collected data from Drosophila crosses to investigate the effects of RNA silencing genes to determine sex-determination BLANK in Drosophila. And the idea behind that research is that it gives us the ability to someday silence gene sets which may be responsible for cancer.

### **What do you love about your field?**

So the thing I love most about medicine I think is because I enjoy community service a lot, but I also enjoy science a lot, and I think that field is a really good way to combine my interests in both the research side and also the human aspect, I really enjoy social work as I mentioned, I volunteered at TMH, and listening to patients' stories and interacting with people and trying to figure out what problems they have and then seeing how those problems can be addressed using science really draws me to the field.

## **Outside of academics, what are your interests and passions?**

I do piano on a weekly basis, I love piano. I've done quite a few recitals, and I've done them in front of older crowds, young crowds, so I practice on a weekly basis for that.

I really enjoy painting, I participated in a little bit of painting with my school's art club.

I really enjoy trying new things, trying new foods. I love learning about different cultures, I was also in Model UN in high school, and so I would learn about - Model UN entails students writing position papers, and arguing on the behalf of another country. So you would kind of learn how to think from the perspective from a nation that's different from your own. So I really think that learning more about the world around you and embracing that cultural diversity is really important.

I love learning new languages, so I love Spanish. I've been co-president of my school's Spanish national honor society, and then I was treasurer of Spanish club the year before that. So that involved bringing that love for learning new languages, new cultures, foods, and ideas to students in my school.

## **Are there any accomplishments or successes you've experienced so far that you are proud of?**

Probably the work I've done with patients. I think it's so important to not just treat the illness that a person has, but to address other factors, like the socioeconomic status, or more specifically troubles with gaining education, or finding housing, or jobs, I think those are all issues that are important in addition to treating the person's illness, you have to consider their background. So I think my work with TMH really motivated me to keep on going and that's something I'm really proud of.

## **Participate in any internships/externships?**

I did the research internship.

I'm about to do one right now - I'm actually going to start on a new research project, and it's an internship with the FSU college of medicine's Alzheimer's project and it's basically to find out how caregivers are affected by their loved ones - how they're affected by having to take care of their loved ones - and the research basically tries to find an answer to the question, how can we make their burden lesser? or how can we make their conditions better? It really touches down on something that I care a lot about which is treating a patients' family, things other than just the illness.

I'm an FSU student now, majoring in pre-health professions, and one of the professors involved in that research is involved in that major.

## **Have you experienced any struggles to get where you are today that you're comfortable with sharing?**

I've been pretty fortunate so far to not have anything too major, I guess I could mention that transition from being non-IB to IB - I think was kind of difficult, from elementary to middle school, all of a sudden everything was different, the curriculum was very difficult, but I'm proud of the fact that I was able to overcome that and get my grades together.

I think the most important thing that helped me stay motivated was the fact that I had a really good support system. And I would advise other students to find themselves a support system like that, find friends who are going through the same thing, family members who will encourage you, and always think about the end-goal, there's always something you should strive towards, and you should try to remember that whenever you feel like giving up.

**Is there anyone in your life that has helped you get to where you are, such as family or friends? How have they supported you?**

I think I would mention my parents. They always helped keep me grounded, and reminded me that just because you have one bad day, or one bad moment, doesn't mean that should take you off track. You should always keep moving toward your goal and just know that eventually you will get there if you keep trying hard enough. Always do your best.

**Professionally, what are your future plans? What are your hopes for the future?**

The end-goal for me is achieving that goal of becoming a physician and serving my community the way that it's helped me. I think it's so important to give back and I think that as a physician I'd have the ability to give back in a way other than just volunteering. You can care for people directly, you can address people's mental, or emotional, or physical needs, and I think that's really important.

**Do you have any advice for the next generation of young professionals seeking to pursue their dreams?**

I think I would say be persistent. I think it's so important to be persistent, a lot of times people give up and then they end up wondering what would have happened if they hadn't given up. So I think it's really important to just keep on going. Constantly ask yourself why you're doing something, so that you can remember what that end goal is (like I mentioned). Further advice, I'd say always keep your head up, and motivate others around you because when you need help, they'll come back for you. And always try to do your best.