



Marissa Olson

High school: Harlem High School

Hometown: Loves Park, Ill.

Majors: Biology, public health

Activities: Camp Kesem, Mortar Board, Circle K International, Chi Alpha Pi sorority, Phi Beta Kappa

Internships: Boone County Health Department in Illinois (BCHD); Mississippi Valley Regional Blood Center (MVRBC); and UnityPoint Health–Trinity in the Infection Prevention Department

Post-grad plans: Pursue a career in public health

“Marissa embodies the Augustana spirit and has truly embraced her passion for public health. She has served many communities through her multiple internships and helped make tangible change on campus during her time in the public health and biology majors. Marissa is one of those students who makes the best of every opportunity and shares her knowledge and experiences with those around her. I am so excited to see where she takes her talents next!”

— Dr. Lena Hann, assistant professor,
public health

MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2020

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

Why Augustana?

Upon my first visit to Augustana, I could see myself pursuing my education here. I felt like I could be at home here. The connectedness to professors and the resources at CORE were what initially drew me to Augustana. I felt like that I would be challenged and that I would be able to grow as a person and as a professional. The beautiful campus was definitely an added bonus. My parents were also persuaded by the scenery such as the slough path on campus.

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

Yes and no. When I came to Augustana, I thought I would major in pre-med with the goal of going to medical school. But, plans changed. Public health is still connected to health care, so in that sense, I am where I thought I would be. I also didn't expect the plethora of opportunities Augustana has given me—from my three successful internships to my leadership role in Camp Kesem. Augustana has allowed me to gain confidence and leadership skills.

Who helped you get to where you are now?

First and foremost, my family has helped me get to where I am today. Their love and support have helped me to go after my passions.

Secondly, CORE and many professors have pushed me and given me invaluable advice when it came to classes and how to navigate career topics. CORE gave me resources to enhance my résumé and cover letter skills.

My advisors, Dr. Dara Wegman-Geedey and Dr. Lena Hann, along with Dr. Rebecca Heick have provided me with direction and helped foster my passion for public health. They have challenged me and pushed me to go after opportunities I would not have otherwise.

Thirdly, my internship mentors (Amanda Mehl from BCHD, Emily Roebuck from MVRBC, and Sarah Castro from UnityPoint Health–Trinity) helped me grow my skills and allowed me to help with and take on large projects. Each of them has been a huge motivator for my desire to continue with public health. I am so thankful for everyone that I have met through Augustana.

Peak experience?

My peak experience was my first internship at the Boone County Health Department in Illinois. I was given the opportunity to work with community partners in my hometown to write a Food Security Action Plan that they use to this day! Seeing the impact my work has made in my community has been a blessing. This internship taught me so much about my capabilities. I also learned that public health should be my path and that I have a true passion for it.

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What surprised you?

Having such a large leadership role in Camp Kesem surprised me. I did not think at the beginning of freshman year that I would have the confidence or leadership capabilities to play such a large part in an organization that I am passionate about. I was one of our development co-coordinators for two years. This position has been challenging, but it has also been rewarding!

How did you use Augie Choice?

I used my Augie Choice to go to Holden Village in January 2020. Holden Village is in the Cascades mountains of Washington. The trip was paired with a class about time, and it couldn't have been more fitting. An added bonus was getting close to my classmates and spending a whole month in the snow!

What will you miss the most?

I will miss the people at Augustana the most—from the friends I have made and the faculty I have grown close to. I will miss eating lunch with my friends in the dining hall, chatting in the Brew and walking along the slough. I will miss the memories I made with them through Camp Kesem, classes and hanging out. I will miss all of my professors who taught me so much. Augustana has allowed me to make so many connections, and I will truly miss seeing everyone daily.

Advice for the Class of 2024?

Take opportunities when they come. What makes Augustana unique are the resources it has and the connections you get from your professors and others. Getting involved and exploring opportunities are part of the Augustana experience. Enjoy your experience!