

2015 Graduate Profile: Catholic High leader shares science, debate skills



By Melody Simmons

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The path for women in the field of science has often been seen as difficult and daunting.

Not, however, for Sarah Nakasone.

She enrolled in The Catholic High School of Baltimore in 2011 because, she was attracted to the school's pioneering STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) program.

The small classes at the school helped her to cement her math and science research skills and , along with forensics, excel in a rounded way, as she served as a page in the Maryland General Assembly.

The 18-year-old will take that experience to the University of Chicago, where she will double major in biology and political science.

From a military family, Nakasone is a self-described "high achiever" who took seven Advanced Placement classes at Catholic High. She was the class of 2015 salutatorian, with the second-highest ranking among 80 seniors.

Captain of the Catholic High Forensics Team, Nakasone has competed as a member of the speech and debate team at Catholic High for four years. She spoke at a recent gala for Catholic High and, according to school President Barbara Nazelrod, "had people in tears" with her reflections on the school.

Being part of both worlds - science and forensics - has helped Nakasone build confidence and leadership skills, she said. She hopes to one day advocate for health policies and global health research on the world stage.

"It's one of those things that shapes you, drastically," she said, of forensics. "My confidence level, my ability to speak to people, how I hold myself, what gestures I use."

She is naturally inquisitive - which is considered essential for a science career. A mentor to younger girls in the area of science education, Nakasone has spent time giving back in hopes of sparking an interest in STEM with others, including many less fortunate.

"These are kids who don't have science backgrounds," she said. "We bring them into a lab on weekends. Some are illegal immigrants, some could be the first in their families to go to college. We show them, 'This could be you in five years.' "

That has been as rewarding as her successes academically at Catholic High, she said.

"It's kind of cemented this is the field in which I want to be in."

What's it like to see a light bulb go off in a younger person's head?

"It's awesome," she said.

Nakasone has also worked at the school in various computer engineering roles. She has been an inspiration to her fellow students.

"I think she has tremendous promise," Nazelrod said. "I don't know what her future is going to bring, but I'm sure it's going to be extraordinary."

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