

Sophomore Shadow: A Valuable Opportunity for Learning and Career Development

Written by: Jon Kleinman, Academic Advisor, Academic Planning Center

“The Sophomore Shadow program took me a long way professionally and academically,” reflects Aliya Jooma (Psychology, Class of 2023). Before starting the program, Aliya already knew that she wanted to become an occupational therapist. Her older sister is a speech pathologist who frequently works collaboratively with occupational therapists. Aliya’s sister suggested occupational therapy as a career path, and after researching the field Aliya agreed.

When Aliya describes her experience with Sophomore Shadow, it’s clear that it was an excellent learning opportunity. “The program prepared us for professional engagement and experiences. I developed skills in building my resume and writing cover letters,” says Aliya. “We learned how to create a LinkedIn profile, and I gained confidence by completing mock job interviews.” Another focus of the Sophomore Shadow program is allowing students to begin building a professional network. In Aliya’s case, meeting professionals in occupational therapy led to further opportunities. “I had an informational interview with Nicole Albany, a professional occupational therapist,” Aliya says. “After the informational interview, I was able to make connections and complete two hospital-based internships.”

Aliya completed internships at Syosset and Plainview hospitals. She shadowed a physical therapist and an occupational therapist who worked together as a team. Aliya recalls, “We were working with patients who had just had surgery and needed to become functional again. We also worked with patients who had conditions that affected their cognition, such as Alzheimer’s or a recent stroke.” While physical therapists would help patients to regain strength, occupational therapists would help patients with activities like dressing, eating, and mobility.” Currently, Aliya has a paid position at a private physical therapy clinic in Garden City.

The Sophomore Shadow program was just one of the many learning opportunities Aliya experienced at Old Westbury. Aliya is a member of the Muslim Student Association and the Psychology club. She’s enjoyed her major coursework, and particularly enjoyed Theories of Personality with Dr. Kiner. Since her goal is to work as a pediatric occupational therapist, she also enjoyed Foundations of Child Development. All Psychology majors at Old Westbury are required to complete a field experience as part of the curriculum. Aliya completed her field experience at a neuropsychology office called Weber Psychological services in Seaford. She gained experience administering tests to assess conditions such as Alzheimer’s disease or ADHD.

Terry-Ann Mowatt (Psychology, class of 2023) is completing a minor in Social Work along with her major. She is interested in applying to Master’s programs in Mental

Health Counseling after she graduates from Old Westbury. Terry-Ann appreciated the Sophomore Shadow program because it was tailored to students' academic and professional interests. In her words, "I spoke to many people in the field of Psychology and learned about a wide range of career options. There are many different paths one can take with a degree in Psychology." Terry-Ann had the opportunity to conduct informational interviews with several professionals who provide mental health services to homeless clients. She also connected with Associate Professor of Psychology Lisa Whitten. Terry-Ann notes, "Dr. Whitten told me about her work as a Black woman in the field of Psychology. She suggested that I become a student member of the Association of Black Psychologists and the Association for Women in Psychology."

Terry-Ann speaks positively about the coursework she's completed at Old Westbury. "All of my classes have been well aligned. I've found that what I'm learning in one class will often help me with other classes I'm taking." Like all Psychology majors, Terry-Ann completed a field experience. She worked at the Seneca Educational Center in Jericho. In her words, "It's an organization that works with differently-abled youth and helps them catch up on social skills. I learned a lot from the children I worked with. There are innovative and creative ways to build people's skills and help them become more capable and independent."

Sarah Iribarren (Childhood Education, Class of 2023) is completing an education degree with a concentration in Spanish Language and Culture. She knew she wanted to become a teacher even when she was still completing her college applications. For Sarah, the Sophomore Shadow program allowed her to reflect on her career goals and consider a wider range of options. In her words, "When I began the program, I had never visited or observed an elementary school classroom. I had planned on getting a certification to teach grades 1-6 and then completing further training to teach kindergarten through second grade. After the Sophomore Shadow program, I decided to take a step back and take some time before setting such precise goals. I became more open-minded after hearing from many different professionals and learning about their experiences."

Sarah sees herself entering her chosen profession as a young teacher who's open to new ideas. She states, "My goal is to be open to learning and to always be flexible. I'm currently working as Teaching Assistant at Union Parkway School in Uniondale. I've seen long-time teachers get frustrated easily. They aren't always nurturing toward their students. As a teacher, if you want respect from children you need to show them respect as well. I feel that respect and nurturing are qualities that need to be brought back into the public school system."

Foundations of Education, a required class for all Childhood Education majors, had a big influence on Sarah. She says, "Much of the assigned reading focused on issues of diversity on Long Island. It's unfortunate that the majority of teachers in this area are white women. Sometimes teachers expect less from students of color. Students will

either meet your high expectations or stoop to your lowest. The only way for students to learn and achieve is if students expect them to be at their best.”