



Sofia Wajner

High school: Palmetto Ridge High School

Hometown: Naples, Fla.

Major: English

Minor: Sociology and anthropology (SOAN)

Activities: Varsity cross country (2016-2017); varsity track & field (2017-2021) with All-American honors in 2018; women's XC/T&F recruiter (2016-2021); Sustained Dialogue member (2019); ADs presenter (2020)

Internships: Augustana's EDGE Center

Post-grad plans: Move to Uruguay to teach English and spend time with family

“Sofia is the embodiment of what any coach would look for in a student-athlete. She is a hard worker. Puts academics first. Intrinsically motivated. She is an amazing teammate and mentor. Sofia has a respect for and understands the journey/process by which success is achieved. That understanding is why she leaves the Augustana track program as an All-American, CCIW champion and school recordholder. It's also why she will continue to be successful after Augustana.”

— David Thompson, head coach, women's cross country/track & field coach

MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2021

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

Why Augustana?

I hadn't even considered an out-of-state school until I got a letter in the mail from Augie Track & Field. My coach mentioned that he coached at Millikin in the 1980s, and Augie was a great school. So I said “yes” to a visit, and it was an entirely different world from Florida.

But something about the team, the coaches and the campus really captivated me. Plus, the coaches called me every weekend, and the recruiting coordinator actually visited my high school in Florida. It really made me feel special.

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

I actually had no idea what I even wanted to study when I came to college, let alone what I wanted to do with my life. I was continually reassured by professors, staff and teammates that it was completely okay that I didn't know what I wanted to do; it took so much pressure off. I was able to try new things and finally land on the idea to move to Uruguay, which I don't think I would have done in a million years if it wasn't for going to such a beautifully challenging and open-minded school.

Who helped you get to where you are now?

So many people that I'll feel bad if I forget someone! I used to be pretty hard-headed actually, and I thought weakness meant asking people for help. That is nowhere near the case. Without every single one of my XC/track coaches, I wouldn't be where I am now — from Coach Ernie in the 6th grade, to Coach Mahan in the 8th, to Coach Butts in high school, and Coach Dave in college — what I've always carried with me is that giving up is never an option.

All of the professors in the English department are the ones who helped me fall more in love with literature and pushed me to assess outside of my fixed notions. Then, of course, I couldn't have grown into who I am without my family and friends, many of whom I met at Augie.

A huge aspect of growth and success, I found, is based on who you surround yourself with. Will your support system hold you accountable, make you laugh and hug you when you cry, all at the same time? Mine did.

Peak experience?

It's so hard to pick just one! From witnessing the Cubs winning the World Series my first year to going to Nationals and becoming an All-American in track my sophomore year, I'd have to say my peak experience has been the changing of seasons.

I went my whole life without seeing a leaf turn orange or a tulip spring from the dirt, and that's an absolute crime. On my campus visit, someone showed me a picture of the Slough in the fall, and that was enough to seal the deal.

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What surprised you?

I was surprised by how much I liked a small school. I was leaning more toward the University of Florida because that's how I always pictured college should be. I was fortunate enough to have some amazing mentors and guidance when I was making my decision to come to a smaller school or I would have been utterly lost in that 500-person lecture hall.

How did you use Augie Choice?

I haven't used it yet, but I'm working on it now!

What will you miss the most?

I know this might seem silly because there are so many incredible aspects of my college experience that I'll always reminisce about, but I'll really miss seeing Centennial Bridge lit up at night. There's this spot down by the river where I've done most of my thinking, running and reading, and the first time I watched the sun set behind the bridge, I realized "home" wasn't a place, but a feeling.

Advice for the Class of 2025?

Let go of resistance! What I say is to think of yourself for once. Don't fight the urge to do what makes you happy if it doesn't align with what someone else has set for you. Ultimately this is your life, and you can't help others the way you want to unless you fill your cup first.