



Annelisa Burns

High school: Metea Valley High School

Hometown: Naperville, Ill.

Majors: Religion; English; German studies

Activities: Reading/Writing Center (RWC) peer tutor, Equestrian Club, Unabridged English Club, Viking Pups, Augustana Symphony Orchestra, Augustana Chamber Orchestra, Phi Beta Kappa academic honor society

Internships: Writing consultant/editor for Dr. Jason Mahn's book "Neighbor Love through Fearful Days"; summer intern at the Christian Century; editor for Dr. Michelle Wolff's manuscript

Post-grad plans: Taking a gap year to work with the Augustana Prison Education Program and Christian Century magazine, before going on to get a master's in religious studies

"Whether tutoring in a prison or presenting at a conference, Annelisa's twin callings of scholarship and service are always on display. Her ability to unite these two vocations makes her exactly the type of humane citizen our riven world needs. I've been honored to teach and learn from Annelisa over the years, and I look forward to her becoming the kind of teacher-scholar who changes her future students' lives."

— Lucas Street, assistant professor, English; director, Reading/Writing Center

Why Augustana?

When I was applying to undergrad, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life, but I got the sense from Augustana that that was okay and that this place would help me discover what I was called to do.

I was also drawn to a place where I could be involved in music without being a music major and join the Equestrian Club to ride horses for fun, not for competition.

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

In some ways, yes — I'm still involved in music and the Equestrian Club, which were two of the main attractions of Augustana. I'm glad that I've been able to balance these important experiences with a newfound discovery of my academic identity.

Majoring in religion was not even on my radar when I arrived on campus. I fell in love with studying religion through my first-year honors class and another class I took just because it sounded like fun.

Who helped you get to where you are now?

Jason Mahn in the religion department has been the most incredible mentor, in and out of the classroom. His classes made me fall in love with theology and religious studies because they showed me that religion and theology matter when it comes to issues of social justice, including climate change and racism.

Dr. Mahn has also helped me discern my vocation as a writer and future religion professor. Because he believed in me, I was able to believe in myself.

I also wouldn't be where I am without the RWC staff. Lucas, Farah and Jake helped me learn to love teaching, writing, and teaching writing. I couldn't have asked for a better work environment. The whole RWC family has always been so supportive. When I walk into that room, I know that there are people who have my back.

Finally, my viola professor, Deb Dakin, has always supported and encouraged me beyond playing the viola. She always asks questions about my work and has wonderful stories to tell.

Peak experience?

I worked as a writing consultant and editor on Dr. Mahn's book, "Neighbor Love through Fearful Days," during the summer after my sophomore year. Doing so gave me a glimpse into the kind of work academics do outside of the classroom. It sharpened my writing and editing skills. And it let me think alongside Dr. Mahn about matters of theology, suffering, race, loss, climate change and purpose. This experience is when I most clearly came to understand my vocation as a religion professor and a writer.

MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2022

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

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What surprised you?

I never thought I would study religion. I thought that studying religion meant becoming a pastor or spending your life reading the Bible. But there's so much more to the field.

How did you use Augie Choice?

I traveled to Holden Village during J-term of 2022. It was a wonderful, transformative experience full of hiking, playing, contemplating, reading, working, crying, healing and sharing community.

What will you miss the most?

I will miss my mentors — although I hope to stay in touch with them, I'll miss being able to wander into their offices when I'm having a bad day or want to talk about this cool book I just read.

Advice for the Class of 2026?

Find mentors that will support you and push you. Have someone that you can go to for any kind of advice — academic, scholarly, future plans, even personal matters. My mentors made my experience at Augustana so special, and I'll treasure these relationships forever.