



## Joanna Bzal

**High school:** Plainfield South High School

**Hometown:** Plainfield, Ill.

**Majors:** Biology (pre-medicine); French

**Activities:** Muslim Student Association, Habitat for Humanity, Multicultural Programming Board (OSL), Big Brother Big Sisters, Trinity UnityPoint volunteer, Phi Beta Kappa academic honor society

**Internships:** Research at MD Anderson Cancer Center (TMCSRIP); cardiovascular internship and an internal medicine internship at UnityPoint Health Trinity Hospital

**Post-grad plans:** Working as a research assistant or a CNA; teaching English in France (TAPIF) before applying to medical school

“Joanna has been a particularly delightful addition to the French program over the last four years. I will miss terribly her creativity, her energy, her humor, and her fearless engagement with the most difficult materials.”  
— Dr. Taddy Kalas, professor, French

### Why Augustana?

I've been asked this question on every admissions tour I've given since sophomore year of college. I was not actually planning on moving away from my hometown, but Augie pushed me to.

The first time I toured Augustana, I fell in love with it right away. My tour guide answered everything that was on my mind, and I knew then that Augie would be a place for me to shine and to become the person I am today. None of the other colleges that I toured promised me the same opportunities and adventures!

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

Yes and no. I always knew that I wanted to build my path to medical school. But I never thought about majoring in French, doing three different internships and leading two different groups.

I came to Augie as a recent immigrant who was still getting used to the new world around her, and Augie helped me pave the way into becoming independent, knowledgeable, passionate and confident. I also didn't know that all of this meant taking a break to travel for a year before going to medical school.

### Who helped you get to where you are now?

My parents are the main reason I am still going right now. No one can outrun the love and support that they gave me throughout these four years and the hard work that they had to go through to ensure that I am following my dreams.

I always say that professors here at Augie are family and friends. Most of my planning for the future happened with my advisor, Brad Kennedy. I can't thank him or Dr. Larson enough for the support, guidance and humor that molded me into a better student and person.

I cannot give enough credit to Dr. Kalas, who pushed me to improve my French since day 1; and to Dr. Kiki, who despite all the craziness and cancellations the world was going through with COVID, tried their best to help me get to go to France and who made my senior year unforgettable.

Each one of my professors left a unique touch through the classes and the conversations that will never be forgotten.

Finally, I am thankful for my friends who lifted me up whenever I fell. The memories are everlasting!

### Peak experience?

My peak experience was conducting research in Dr. Gopalakrishnan's lab at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas. Even though I am still planning on pursuing a career in medicine and not in research, I am grateful for the research work environment that I got to explore. I don't think any of my experiences were more powerful than trying to find a solution to treat someone's kid, brother, sister and friend with cancer!

## MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2022

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

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### What surprised you?

My growth. I saw myself growing with every high, low and experience that I went through. Each moment during these four years changed me into someone new — my better self. I became independent and confident in a way that I never thought I would ever become. I never understood how fast these four years can go and how much I could accomplish.

### How did you use Augie Choice?

I used my Augie Choice to cover my housing expenses during my Texas Medical Internship at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

### What will you miss the most?

Everything! From waking up way too early in the morning to study for a test, having a conversation with a professor on the way to class, getting coffee from the Brew, to staying with friends at an environmental lab for a retreat. Every moment counts, and I will miss all of them. College happens once in a lifetime, and I am happy to say that Augie made it one to remember!

### Advice for the Class of 2026?

Take the opportunities that Augie has to offer without any hesitation. You'll be surprised at how much you can learn about others and yourself from doing something new. College is about self exploration more than anything else. Take advantage of it and make it count!