

Sarah Williams-Shealy

Sarah Williams-Shealy graduated from Saluda High School in 2016. She was a member of Beta Club and participated with the Academic Bowl Team. She received several scholarships for college, including Palmetto Fellows, Teaching Fellows, a Lander academic scholarship, and an English departmental scholarship. She now attends Lander University and is majoring in Secondary Education.



Q1: Sarah, which specific teacher(s)/class(es) prepared you the most for college? And how so?

AP classes! Mr. Roesner and Mrs. Minick especially prepared me for college. The AP workload and curriculum they brought into their classrooms is the closest I got in high school to what a four-year college is really expecting a student to be capable of. Coach Brent Wilder's Film & Literature Honors class also helped prepare me for the expectations of the college curriculum. He was very tough on us and had high expectations, just like most professors do in the college environment.

Q2: What was the best decision you made as a high school student?

To take as many honors and AP classes as I could. Having those experiences in high school have helped me to excel in college, and I could not be happier. It was still very hard to adjust, but I can only imagine how much harder it would have been had I not challenged myself in high school.

Q3: What regrets do you have? What do you wish you had done differently while in high school?

I wish I had tried harder my freshman year, and I wish I had tried a little bit harder in my honors math classes because they were my weak points. I wish I had known that it was a better idea to focus on them more, specifically because they were my weaknesses that I needed to improve upon, rather than just running away from them.

Q4: What specific classes/programs do you wish SHS had offered?

I wish I had been given the opportunity to do all AP, rather than dual enrollment. I feel like my peers and I placed a higher emphasis on our GPAs, rather than the quality of education we were receiving. I find more quality in AP because it doesn't matter whether or not you pass the exams and receive credit, it's about being exposed to a collegiate level classroom environment early on. AP taught me how to learn, how to think both logically and analytically, and it was the starting point of me learning how to do the things I once thought were impossible in college. Three complex, five-page or more papers due on the same day with little preparation time? Check! AP English taught me how to handle that. In-depth thinking about Eastern Asia Pop Culture Studies for my Honors 211 class at Lander? Check! Mr. Roesner gave me those priceless skills in AP Human Geography. If SHS had offered more AP classes while I was a student, I would have taken as many as possible!

Q5: What advice would you give to a 9th grader?

Start thinking about college NOW. Don't wait until your junior year, or even your sophomore year. Your grades from freshman year impact your GPA just as much as your grades from your senior

year will. You will need that GPA to graduate and obtain a job, or to get into your dream college. Get your priorities in line, set your goals straight, focus on prepping for those standardized exams if you are college bound and moving onto the next stage of your life. Whether you want to be the manager of an establishment, or a PhD scholar, you don't want to play around in high school because ultimately it will set the stage for your life to come.

Q6: What advice would you give to a 12th grader?

The real world is nothing like you thought it would be. All of the slacking off and playing around that you did in high school, just won't cut it anymore. I know it's scary, but it's time to be serious.

Q7: What advice would you give to the parent of a high schooler?

Encourage your child, no matter what they want to do. Don't try to force them to be something they aren't, and chances are that they will ultimately succeed in what they decide to do.

Q8: How did AP prepare you for college?

I took two AP classes in high school, and I don't think anything could have better prepared me for college. The workloads were similar, the expectations were similar, and both of my amazing teachers taught a lot like a professor does. They weren't just facilitators - they were educators. Which is something that all high school students desperately need. Sometimes telling kids what to do just doesn't cut it, you have to explain and show them in various ways.

Q9: Is there anything else you'd like to share with us? Any other revelations you've had over the last semester? Anything else you can think of that would help future SHS graduates be more successful in college?

I am so incredibly thankful for the wonderful education I received from Saluda High School. What I put in, I got right back out from my teachers and the skills that they gave me. Now I'm on the President's List in my first semester at a four-year university, and I'm in their honor's college, somehow exceeding even my wildest expectations for myself. Four years ago, when I started SHS, I never thought I would amount to much of anything or have a chance at becoming successful. It just goes to show the difference that talented professionals can make when their hearts are constantly giving back to all of their students. Saluda might be a small town, but our teachers have some serious skills and big hearts. As a future educator, I now realize what it takes, and I am so incredibly grateful for the amazing teachers I had. I am in awe of what they do for the students at SHS every single day.

To the future SHS alumni, don't ever think that just because you're from Saluda you can't go places. All of the staff and the faculty; the love that they will give you and show you is genuine, uplifting, life-changing, and you can go ANYWHERE you want to with their support, I promise. Take it from me, I've overcome what I thought was impossible and achieved every single one of my wildest dreams because of it.