



Student

SPOTLIGHT

Featured
Independent
Tribune

4th June 2024

Article:
2024 Senior Spotlight



Rayyan Syed

Class of 2024

1. What has been the highlight of your K-12 career?

The highlight of my K-12 career was being honored with the opportunity to present my advanced cancer genomics research at the North Carolina Science & Engineering Fair against some of the top science projects at the state level.

Through this experience, I was not only blessed with placing third place in the state, but also with making life-lasting connections with budding researchers and established scientists in the field. Encouraged by the positive results of the fair, I took the research one step further by writing a research paper and submitting it for publication — the study was recently accepted for publication in a Harvard University journal.

2. What will you miss most about your time at your school?

I will dearly miss the community we have fostered over my last 12 years with this graduating class. I know that whoever I turned to in my class, they would always be there to not just make my voice feel heard, but also understood and cared for.

3. Is there a specific tradition or ritual at your school that holds special significance for you?

“The Day that Shall Not Be Named” (Cannon’s version of a mystery field day) is a personal highlight for me due to the cross-grade interaction that occurs. I really appreciate days like these as I get to interact with faces I’ve never gotten to know before on a deeper level, once again strengthening that bond and sense community amongst the entire Upper School that Cannon prides itself on.

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4. What are your plans after graduation?

I am currently enrolled in the 8-year combined medical degree (BS/MD) program with the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

5. How do you think you've changed or grown over the past four years?

Over the last four years, I've gradually began to not just refine my strengths, but also lean into my weaknesses. I struggled with time management and effective communication, and I realized it's these qualities that prevented me from progressing into the best version of myself. Thus, I pushed myself into activities to dismantle those weaknesses, such as the House System or the Cannon Envirothon competition team. My persistence for growth eventually led me to leading as Head for both organizations.

6. What impact did the pandemic have on your school experience?

The pandemic had a significant impact to the start of my high school experience. I attended Cannon as a full remote student during my freshman year. While it did hinder my introduction into high school and meeting new teachers and friends, I remained flexible and open minded to unconventional ways to connect, whether that's online study sessions with classmates or hanging out during lunch on FaceTime. The teachers too were very supportive, constantly making sure I felt included in class. All this was possible just because we all were driven to learn and grow.

7. Can you describe a time when you felt particularly proud of an achievement?

My most proud achievement occurred through my service organization, LearnSmart Academy. I designed LearnSmart to help students in rural India unlock virtual learning opportunities during COVID. Local village students would gather around a computer setup with WiFi, and then socially distanced 4th-10th graders would come up one by one to be

tutored by me in everything from algebra to biology. Even after COVID ended, LearnSmart continued as students appreciated the individualized approach to learning I provided.

This year, through my organization, I inaugurated a scholarship program by selecting three rural Indian students graduating high school and covering their entire college tuition. To fundraise this money, I traveled to India, met all the LearnSmart students in-person for the first time, and worked on Indian crop fields together with the kids, pooling all the money earned into the scholarship.

8. Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give your younger self entering high school for the first time?

I would encourage the notion that everything will fall into place when it needs to — you just need to be ready to act on it when it does fall. If you're working towards a goal in tiny steps, day-by-day, that's all that matters. Because eventually, your everyday hard work will reward you with that larger goal.

