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Glencoe Student Completes Virtual Summer Intensive Arabic Language Program on U.S. Department of State NSLI-Y Scholarship

Makena Krause was one of 500 students competitively selected from across the United States for virtual exchange programs in critical languages

Hillsboro, Oregon (Aug. 14, 2020) – Makena Krause, a senior at Glencoe High School and potential future diplomat, was awarded a National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) Virtual Summer Intensive Scholarship to study the Arabic language for five weeks. Makena was one of approximately 500 students selected from 3,000 applicants from across the United States to study Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Korean, Persian, Russian, or Turkish over their summer break. She was one of seven students across the country to study beginning Arabic.

Originally intended as an overseas immersion program to promote critical language learning among American youth, NSLI-Y would have had Makena travel to Morocco to stay with a host family, study Arabic for a couple hours a day at a local school or university and integrate cultural activities during her stay. Instead, the online alternative was developed in response to global COVID-19 restrictions.

“NSLI-Y did such an amazing job virtually,” Makena remarked. “The teachers taught two hours a day every day from Monday through Friday and gave us lots of homework. They had everything planned out through presentations and inviting speakers from the native region, or NSLI-Y alumni, to speak to us. The teachers were amazing as well as my fellow students who were from New York, Dallas, Chicago, Seattle and elsewhere. We learned a lot even if we weren’t in Morocco.”

Although Makena took on Arabic studies for a potential career in diplomacy or foreign service, she also believes that connecting through language and culture brings us together, so we can learn from and understand each other better.

She said, “My favorite phrase is ‘as-salamu alaikum,’ which is the first phrase we learned, and it means ‘peace be upon you.’ It is an Arabic greeting that we use quite frequently [that connects us]. Whenever I heard that during class with our teacher smiling at us, we were always ‘wa-alaikum-salaam’ [and unto you peace] back at her.”

Discovering Arabic cuisine also developed understanding and connections. Cooking was a favorite cultural activity because Makena is a “big person in the kitchen.” A virtual lesson

included couscous, glazed onions, and chicken in a “special broth that had lots of spices and color.”

“It was really powerful for me,” she said, “to learn how to cook Arabic dishes every Friday and incorporate that into my life here in America. This helped me gain a new perspective as well as bond with my teacher and classmates, speaking in Arabic or laughing at something as we cooked.”

Makena plans to continue her Arabic studies in her senior year at Glencoe through online classes at Brigham Young University or, at minimum, referring back to NSLI-Y’s class website and keeping up with classmates. She plans to connect with SOAR [Sponsors to Assist Refugees] to help with the Arab immigrants in this area just to have quick conversations and learn from each other.

In the future, Makena may defer college to experience a gap year in NSLI-Y’s year-long immersion program, hopefully in Morocco this time, and/or a two-year intensive Arabic flagship program at a U.S. university. When she does attend college, Makena plans to continue studying Arabic as well as international relations.

NSLI-Y is part of a multi-agency U.S. Government initiative launched in 2006 to improve Americans’ ability to communicate in select critical languages, advance international dialogue, and provide Americans with jobs skills for the global economy. Many NSLI-Y alumni go on to pursue education and careers vital to U.S. national security and credit the program experience with helping them improve their academic, leadership, and cross-cultural communication skills.

NSLI-Y is administered by American Councils for International Education in cooperation with AFS-USA, American Cultural Exchange Service, AMIDEAST, iEARN-USA, the Russian American Foundation, Stony Brook University, the University of Delaware, and the University of Wisconsin.

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