

Working for What You Want



“I’m realizing if I want it, I can get it, as long as I work for it. That is something they definitely taught me here.” Catherine Rodriguez, graduating senior at The Academy at Smith, has big plans for her future.

“I want to be a forensic psychologist.” She says that will start with a double major and minor at UNCG this fall. “I want to major in psychology and double major in literature, languages and culture so I can get my translator degree. I am bilingual, but I’m not certified. I’ll also minor in criminalistics to better understand the legal system as a forensic psychologist.”

It’s all for the end goal of helping her community.

“Unfortunately, in my community, there aren’t a lot of supports that people know about. I’ve seen how psychology can help people first-hand, and I want to be that pillar in my community.”

Rodriguez says her confidence comes from her experience at The Academy at Smith.

“I was really shy, and I would wait for people to come to me,” she said. “As soon as I got here, since it’s so small and you feel so close to everyone, the shyness left and I became a big extrovert. That led me to realize I can ask for whatever I want and get information about whatever I want.”

“Catherine is a good motivator,” said counselor Gwen Atkinson. “She keeps me on my toes. Before I can get anything out, she’s asking about it. She makes sure she stays abreast of everything going on and goes the extra mile to be an advocate for her classmates. She encourages her friends to take more college classes and pushes them.”

Catherine will start her college career with 22 college credits after dually enrolling in GTCC her senior year.

“It will make college cheaper, and it gives you a chance to see what college will be like,” she explained.

Catherine encourages everyone to take advantages of the opportunities their school makes available. For her, in addition to dual enrollment, she is working toward her pharmacy technician credential and should be certified by the time she graduates.

“If you’re interested in a health career, I would definitely recommend The Academy at Smith,” she said. “It gets you started by introducing you to different pathways, and the certifications you can earn like pharmacy or CNA (certified nursing assistant) can help set you apart from the rest.”

Rodriguez said, as motivated as she is, she wouldn’t have been as successful without the support of her family.

“I would tell my parents about all the opportunities here, and they wouldn’t let anything slide, because I do slack off and get senioritis, so they would keep me on my feet. I’ve been grounded this whole year and focused on what I want, and I got it. Now it’s time of the next step.”