Who are the AHS Summer Scholar Awardees?

Qatar Foundation International (QFI) is launching the 2022 applications for the AHS Incoming Freshman Awards and AHS Summer Scholar Awards. While we prepare to select this year’s award recipients, let’s look back at the experiences of the 2021 awardees.

QFI selected 5 Arabic Honor Society students to receive the Summer Scholar Award in 2021. Awardees were able to dedicate part of their summer to exploring new countries, learning new vocabulary, and getting a boost in their knowledge of the language that will bring them closer to their proficiency goals. Award recipients were selected based on the strength of their application essays, which gave students a chance to demonstrate their passion for learning Arabic. Awardees showed their dedication to improving their language skills as well as a curiosity about the Arab world and its cultures.

Meet Dania (Atlanta, Georgia)

Dania is studying Arabic at North Atlanta High and was able to participate in the Alif Institute's summer program in Atlanta, Georgia. Dania was able to improve her speaking skills saying that she now has the confidence to introduce herself in Arabic and improved her reading skills by increasing her vocabulary. Dania says she was able to make friendships this summer with people she wouldn't have met otherwise and got to experience new things like trying Arabic food, learning about the history of Arabic calligraphy, and the opportunity to learn dabke! She encourages other students to "not let the language intimidate you and keep practicing!" In her video, Dania shares advice, her experience and explains why you should learn Arabic. You can hear more from Dania here: AHS Summer Scholar Awardee Why you should learn Arabic.
Meet Kokayi (Chicago, Illinois)

Kokayi joined the Arabic Honor Society in 2021 after studying Arabic for 3 years at Lindblom Math and Science Academy. The AHS Summer Scholar Award funded his participation at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign's summer Arabic program. Kokayi says he “was able to take a college-level Arabic course and further my love for the Arabic language.” Kokayi is now a sophomore at Lindblom Math and Science Academy and is continuing to study Arabic for the fourth year. He hopes to become bilingual and even used the Arabic Online [arabiconline.eu] program sponsored by QFI to continue to develop his skills.

He offers this piece of advice to anyone hesitant to get into Arabic “it is a huge commitment for sure and will require lots of discipline but in the end, it is worth it and will lead you to make great experiences and have the opportunity to go to amazing places.”

Meet Blake (Pottstown, Pennsylvania)

Blake used the award to study abroad at Qalam wa Lawh’s summer program in Rabat, Morocco. He recalls the most memorable parts of his trip, like staying with a welcoming host family in Rabat and traveling to Tangier, Chefchaouen, Ouarzazate, and Marrakech. He “vividly remember[s] having a phenomenal زعزع, which is a drink that is close to a smoothie made from mostly an avocado blend topped with a variety of delicious toppings.”

Although Blake was introduced to Arabic from a former soccer coach, he has been studying Arabic for the past three years at the Hill School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. When asked about the impact the trip had on Blake, he says “it's hard to say exactly how this trip to Morocco will shape my professional life, but I certainly know that academically it not only tremendously helped with improving my Arabic language skills, but also opened me up to new horizons of thought. I gained a new perspective on the world, and it is hard to put a price tag on just how valuable that is. In the future I hope to do work that allows me or encourages me to travel to other countries, and hopefully back to Morocco! If all goes well, I will have opportunities to travel to other countries in the Middle East North Africa region to learn more about countries that are often misunderstood and to further my knowledge of the Arabic language.”
Meet Gwendolynn (Chicago, Illinois)

Gwendolynn is an Arabic student at Lindblom Math and Science Academy and decided to travel to Morocco with CIEE’s summer program to take her Arabic to the next level! You can get a little bit of insight into Gwendolynn’s exciting study abroad experience through her vlog: AHS Summer Scholar Awardee_Video Gwendolynn Takes Morocco. She speaks about the highlights and challenges of traveling abroad for the first time. Although she was faced with the challenge of learning fusHa and Darija in the classroom, she loved learning from a native speaker and staying with a host family who welcomed her into their lives for the summer. She was even able to celebrate Eid with her host family and visit famous landmarks!

Meet Elise (Atlanta, Georgia)

Elise is a high school senior from Atlanta and was also selected to receive the award to study Arabic at the Alif Institute in Atlanta, Georgia. Elise says that she “hadn’t previously gotten many opportunities to interact with the Arab community” before participating in this program. She is currently in her school’s IB program and will be continuing to take Arabic at North Atlanta High. She reflects on how this summer experience will impact her – “in the short term, this will help me with my IB exam, but in the long term this should help me connect with Arab peoples enough to establish a level of comfort around them by helping to break down the barrier of getting to know each other.” The program lasted six weeks, with the last week in Dearborn Michigan and included exposure to aspects of Arab culture including calligraphy, coffee, food, music and dabke! Elise says that dabke was one of the highlights of the program. Here's a statement from Elise:

"None of us students had taken dabke lessons before... It was a wonderful group bonding exercise- we would hold hands, sweaty, laughing and stomping to the beat of the tune, quickly learning to pick up the pace or perform tricks when stepping into the spotlight. What was more fascinating to me was learning how the dance varies between regions, and how important it was culturally."

"For any students currently studying Arabic that are looking to apply for a QFI grant, my advice is this: go for it. I now have so many more practical applications for this language and knowledge that will aid me in years to come. The program helped me connect to Atlanta’s Arab community, but it also helped me learn more about cultural barriers and pushed me outside my comfort zone (in a good way- I know significantly more about the Arabic language and the people who wield it). Overall, I had a wonderful experience this past summer and will certainly use the language for years to come."

To learn more about the 2022 AHS academic awards, please email arabichonorsociety@qfi.org.