

Student Awarded Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Scholarship

Mariana Valbuena, a Somerset Academy Charter High School senior has been awarded the prestigious Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Scholarship.

As a scholarship recipient, Mariana will experience German life firsthand next year. She will live with a selected volunteer host family who will provide room, board and a caring environment. Mariana will attend school, participate in community life, culture and recreation, all while learning about Germany and its culture.

"Being a student at Somerset Academy Charter has definitely allowed me to grow as an individual. The fact that every student is part of a diverse yet close-knit community allows for personal attention from teachers and staff. This charter school has encouraged me to work hard and inspired me to make my dreams come true," explains Mariana about her years at Somerset Academy in Pembroke Pines.

Mariana, a young socially-conscious community activist, is quite busy serving not only her community, but others as well. Among her recent activities was a mission trip in 2006 to a poor town in Lima, Peru where she served as the group translator. During this trip, she helped build homes, assisted in a local school, and distributed food and water. She ventured on a similar trip to the Dominican Republic as well. Mariana is currently working on an independent service project designed to help a group of poverty-stricken children of Colombia. She is planning, organizing, and carrying out the project that will provide a sponsor family for each child. Mariana has volunteered at nursing homes, soup kitchens and hospitals. She tutors students struggling with school work and teachers who desire to learn Spanish. Mariana is a mentor of the CHANCE Big Brother Big Sister Program and she recently won the Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizens Award.

The Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Scholarship program provides full scholarships for American high school students to live with a host family and attend school in Germany for a year. This unique program is jointly funded by the German Bundestag and the U.S. Congress, through the U.S. Department of State and is awarded to only 50 students from the Southeast U.S.

Finalists for the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Scholarship are selected based on many criteria. The objective of the program is to offer this unique opportunity to the students whom best represent the diversity of the United States. To be eligible, the student must be a U.S. citizen, national or permanent resident and have a GPA of 3.0 or better on a 4.0 scale. The student must show evidence of the personal qualities essential for adjustment to another culture such as flexibility, curiosity, open-mindedness, sense of humor and a desire to be challenged. Written and oral communication skills are also evaluated as are the motivation for a cross-cultural experience.

After her year in Germany, Mariana plans to attend Duke University where she has been awarded a scholarship. She aspires to major in a science related matter that will entail research and being surrounded by nature.

*Located at 20805 Johnson Street in Pembroke Pines, **Somerset Academy Charter High School** is a public charter school serving students in grades K – 12. Public charter schools are a vital, thriving component of Florida's K-12 public education system. Charter schools are public schools that are operated by individuals or groups under contract with their sponsor - usually a local public school district. They are required to participate in federal and state accountability programs, such as FCAT and No Child Left Behind, and are held strictly accountable for both academic and financial performance. There are currently more than 350 public charter schools in the state of Florida serving close to 100,000 K through 12th grade students.*