



For immediate release
May 7, 2020

UPDATED 5/8/2020

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Sophia Ruark Receives Alumnae Senior Woman's Service Award
(photo available)

Evanston, Ill. --- Sophia Ruark is the recipient of the 2020 Senior Woman's Service Award given by The Alumnae of Northwestern University. The award, established by The Alumnae in 2002, honors a senior woman for volunteer service during her undergraduate years at Northwestern University.

Sophia, from Grand Ledge, Michigan, a senior in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences (WCAS) and at the Illinois Institute of Technology, is graduating this spring with a major in psychology and a legal studies minor.

Throughout her time at Northwestern, Sophia has participated in Air Force ROTC, which has the core value of "Service Before Self." This involvement has provided her with leadership skills, purpose, and the opportunity to earn a commission as an Air Force officer. She will be headed to Cannon Air Force in New Mexico to be a Remotely Piloted Aircraft Officer, becoming the first woman in her detachment in at least five years to do so.

Sophia became involved with a new Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP) in October 2018, beginning as an administrative assistant. The program has a special place in her heart since her father was incarcerated at different times in her life. Her tutoring at Statesville (Illinois) Correctional Center allowed her to speak directly with prisoners about their needs. She expanded her tutoring program by founding the Undergraduate Prison Education Partnership (UPEP) in 2018 and serves as its President. Groups of students work to provide prisoners with reentry programming, academic support and enrichment, awareness initiatives, and more. They recently secured a \$1 million sponsorship from the Mellon Foundation to expand and continue their programs.

Sophia writes, "Students at Statesville Correctional Center have said that our programs and emphasis on education have given them new life and perspective. Education, especially in a place as limiting and austere as a prison, leaves no one unaffected. It has made me and so many others fall in love with education all over again."

Sophia also served as president of the Arch Society and student director of the Northwestern Alumni Association Board, organizing and supporting events that engage undergraduates and Northwestern alumni in career advancement and networking opportunities for young professionals. In addition, she was lead research assistant and trainer for the Affective Cognition and Neuroscience Laboratory, where she welcomed the chance to facilitate meaningful connections among people.

On top of all of the above, including getting good grades, Sophia has spent 35 hours per week in work-study activities during her time at Northwestern. This spring, she received a Purple Pride Award at the 2019 Wildcat Excellence Awards for her work with UPEP.

“Sophia is a model for volunteer service on the Northwestern campus – what an amazing woman,” notes Julie McDowell, chair of The Alumnae’s Senior Woman’s Service Award committee.

Sophia received the Senior Woman’s Service Award of \$1,000 from The Alumnae of Northwestern University’s in May 2020. She will also be recognized at Honors Day and commencement.

The Alumnae of Northwestern University is an all-volunteer organization of women that raises funds for a wide range of projects to benefit Northwestern while sharing the university’s academic resources with the community through its Continuing Education program. Founded in 1916, and celebrating its Centennial in 2016, The Alumnae has given more than \$9 million to the university in the form of grants, fellowships, scholarships, an endowed professorship, funding for special university projects, and summer internships. For more information, visit The Alumnae website (www.nualumnae.org).

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