

2020 Kinesiology Outstanding Senior

MARIA STIENS



Congratulations to Maria Stiens, our Department of Health and Kinesiology Outstanding Senior for 2020! This prestigious award takes into consideration the individual's scholarship, leadership, professionalism, and service to others. Maria is outstanding in all of these areas. Maria has been on the Dean's List all of her semesters at Purdue and she is a top student in our Movement and Sport Sciences major.

Since Spring 2019, Maria has been a valuable team member in [Dr. Laura Claxton's Life-Span Motor Development Lab](#). Maria works on an innovative research project investigating how carrying differently sized and weighted objects impacts walking and crawling abilities in infants. This year, Maria received a Purdue Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR) Scholarship to continue with her research. As part of this year-long program, she will be presenting her research at the Spring 2020 Purdue Undergraduate Research Conference.

“The little things really can make a difference”

during her time at Purdue, including serving as the HHS student representative on the HHS curriculum committee, serving as a retreat staff head at Boiler Awakening, as a chapter member of [Adopt a Grandparent Club](#), and working one on one with a child with special needs in the Pete's Pals program. Maria is trained as a Registered Behavior Technician for administering ABA (applied behavior analysis) therapy to children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In this role, she continues to work at different ABA therapy centers, where she implements therapy strategies to young clients with Autism.

In terms of her leadership and service to others, Maria has taken on several service and leadership responsibilities

Maria's first realization that she wanted to help individuals with disabilities came when she volunteered in high school with the Special Olympics. One of the aspects of occupational therapy that appeals to her most is that it “strives to increase the quality of life amongst all patients”. Her own personal experiences interacting with her grandfather who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease taught her that “the little things really can make a difference”. She was able to see first-hand how sensory stimulation (like playing music, taking him on walks in nature, and engaging in household activities like baking and gardening) increased his quality of life.

Starting in May, Maria will be attending IUPUI to pursue a Doctorate in Occupational Therapy (ODT). Maria believes that it is “a beautiful thing to have made an impact on someone's life, whether that be on development, recovery, or adaptation to illness/injury.” Not only does she love the profession, but her communication skills, empathy, ability to work with others, and hard-working attitude make her well-suited for a profession in health care. Maria has a very promising future and she will make a significant impact in the field of Occupational Therapy.