An Interview with BHSEC Newark Student Jenny Fadiya
By Jais Jurita

An early college education is a challenging but rewarding choice for a high school student. As an early college student myself, I know the importance of an early college education and what it can provide. In this interview, I sat down with my peer Jenny Fadiya and we got to discuss her experience at BHSEC Newark thus far, how she navigates the challenges of being an early college student, and her advice for incoming students.

This interview was edited and condensed for brevity.

Today I am here with a fellow BHSEC student, may you please state your name, your grade, and what campus you're from.

Hi, my name is Jenny Fadiya. I am currently a Year 1 student [traditional 11th grade] at the Bard High School Early College Newark campus.

Wonderful! You mentioned you are a Year 1 of the college program, can you share a bit more how your experience has been thus far?

So far, my experience at Bard has definitely been one of a kind, coming from my middle school which was really all over the place. This place feels like it has it a bit more together; it's more guiding, especially the early college program. I've met such amazing people that I am able to call my friends. The atmosphere here is so welcoming, the staff are so kind, you don't feel pressured to do anything, you don't feel like you have to meet up to standards, you feel like you're being accepted everywhere you go. The teachers are amazing. I love all of my teachers that I've had every year.

Would you say there's a difference from your 9th and 10th grade years, which would be considered your high school years, to your college years [replacing traditional 11th and 12th grade]? How has it been for you transitioning from a high school environment in terms of classes, to now, a college environment?

That's a great question honestly. The difference is primarily the stress. It's not that much of a difference, but my mindset is: if you want to stay average in school, it's not that hard, but if you want to be noticed and want universities or teachers or students to realize your potential, it is much harder because you have to get on top and also stay on top. So, it was a big difference. It's harder definitely, with the stress. I have to keep up with a lot of things like my mental health, my grades, and my life in general.

That's amazing. I want to dig a little more into you personally, and I want to know what's currently your academic status as of right now. How has it been for you? Has it been hard to maintain?

Currently I'm pretty sure I'm number 1 in our class. My GPA is a 4.2. It has been hard - there've been a lot of stressful days, a lot of days where I just feel like "Man, is this really worth it?" But I'm personally a religious person, so I have my own religion that keeps me standing and keeps me going even when times get tough, and also my family and friends. So far I'm doing pretty good, it's hard but my GPA is staying strong and my rank is also staying strong.

What was your thought process when choosing BHSEC Newark? Was it your number 1 choice? What about this school interested you?

Like most people, if you ask them why they came to Bard, it would be because of the amazing, once in a lifetime program. If you ask any staff or any adult anywhere in the building, they would tell you that Bard is one of a kind, and that this is something you wouldn't find back in their days or that much in recent time, and that's what drew me here. And I genuinely am really happy. Of course you might be having the usual exhaustion, the usual tiredness, but sometimes I just think this is where I'd want to be if I was given the choice. The process of coming to this school was actually pretty easy. I didn't think I was going to get in - I was very nervous, but I signed up, I did the interview and it went really well. I prepped a lot for the interview, I did the test, and I was accepted. I was so proud of myself and my acceptance.

That's awesome. I want to dig more into the Bard early college program itself, and I want to know how do you view the program?

Okay, that's a very good question. I've said it before, it's a really unique program. When I was signing up for the school, it was the only school I ever heard about that offers [this kind of curriculum]. But, I view this program as something so unique and so amazing. When I was in middle school I never thought of something like this, I would've never thought you get your associates degree in high school. I'm very happy I got into this program. It saves me so much time, it saves my parents so much time and money and so much stress that they could've potentially had. I'll be doing my own work, I'll be attentive and scholarly, and I try to push other people to do the same, and I'll say, "Hey, especially for junior year, you have to lock in, this is the year that everyone's looking at, this is also, like you're getting such a good opportunity with this." I wish other people would understand that and not take it as much for granted.

What is something you think the school could reflect on or improve on in terms of the type of environment we're in and the type of pressure we experience as early college students?

Okay, what I'm going to say is a tiny bit controversial. I don't think it's a bad thing that we feel pressure to do well in school. A lot of people have different pressures in life, so whenever someone asks me that question, I don't know ever really have an actual answer that I can give because I don't know. I can't say "Give less work," because I have to learn, I have a future ahead of me and I can't just say I want less work because that's not a very smart thing to do because you have to learn. The program is amazing and it's going to be hard; you're essentially a college student taking college classes, getting college credits, and so the best thing to do is to just find some sort of comfort that could help you along the way to cope with the pressure. You're only going to go higher and the workload is going to get harder. So, there's really nothing that I would really change about this school because it is a really great school, it's just the pressure that comes with it that makes it hard.

That's amazing and really inspiring! Now, to conclude, if you had a message that you could tell to incoming freshmen, what is a message you would give out to them?

The message that I want to give incoming freshmen is to not slack or stay behind. It's your life that you're in control of as we speak, as you walk down those halls, it's your life that you have to take control of.

I hope that those who are incoming freshmen and those who are getting closer to that transition from high school courses to college courses, are able to hear your perspective and have the same principles that you have had and I know that this type of mindset is going to take you far more places, and I can't wait to see what else God has in store for you.

Jais Zurita is a Year 1 student at Bard High School Early College Newark. Early college is important to Jais because it opens doors and offers resources to opportunities that are not always easily accessible. She is the Communications and Writing Fellow for the Bard Early College Network.