

A student from Niger graduated from UAFS!

A story about Rasila Soumana Hama: her journey from Niger to UAFS

The University of Arkansas – Fort Smith has students from a variety of places. **Rasila Soumana Hama** is just one of many students who have traveled far from home to study at UAFS.

Hama arrived in Fort Smith in October 2010 from **Niamey, Niger**. She first went through three months of English language study to improve her English skills. Through the program, she was assigned to a host family to help give her a glimpse of American culture. Although her mother chose UAFS for her, Hama admits she was pleasantly surprised by how much she liked it.

Hama started her college career at UAFS in spring 2011, with biology as her declared major. During her four years here, she became very active on campus. She was involved with many organizations, including the Campus Activities Board, the Student Government Association, the Biology Club, the International Leadership Council, the Student Alumni Association, and the African Student Association. Organizing **African Night** on campus was among her proudest accomplishments during her time as a student. Hama says being a part of different organizations has helped her grow and broaden her horizons.

The Office of International Relations interviewed Hama about her experiences here.

Q: What was your best experience while here?

A: I had so many memorable experiences here that I really don't know what to tell you. I have visited great places such as Washington, D.C., Chicago, Memphis, Dallas, Houston, Oklahoma City, Missouri, Kansas and so many more. I met so many people and have made so many friends. I have conquered my fear of high rides. I even went scuba diving despite my fear of water. Overall, I enjoyed every single day of my experience. It was very educational, challenging and mostly fun. I do have one more thing to cross off my bucket list: Skydiving.

Q: What was your worst experience?

A: Being sick my first year here. I don't usually get sick, but when I do, I was used to being taken care of by my mom. For the very first time, I had to do it myself.

Q: What was your funniest experience?

A: I really have to think about this one. I have had so much fun here that I just can't choose one.

My first pumpkin carving, Christmas light show, Thanksgiving and so many more. Oh, my first time watching an American football game was very fun, too. I had been looking forward to that game for a whole week. For me, football was just the regular soccer we play back home. Imagine my face when I saw what they were doing. That was definitely not what I was expecting.

Rasila Soumana Hama

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Q: Were you ever homesick? If so, how often? What caused it?

A: Oh yes, so many times. Especially during the holiday seasons, school breaks, and whenever I try cooking a dish from my country. About anything can trigger that homesickness, the smell of a food, pictures, the holiday spirit, social media.

A look into her present

This December, Hama graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology. She was asked a couple of questions concerning her success.

Q: If you ever had problems with your professors, what did you do to resolve them?

A: I don't think I ever had an issue with my professors. I regularly attended classes and turned in my assignments on time. When I do not understand something I just stop by their office and they are usually more than happy to help. I should mention that it has not been easy learning to go and talk to my professors. Back home, they did not have office hours, and if you have a question you either ask it in class or go find somebody to explain it to you.

Q: Did you have any difficulties in any of your classes? If so, what were they and how did you survive it?

A: The major difficulty I had was the language barrier. The English my professors used was way too fast for me to understand them. Also, due to my accent it was very difficult for them to understand me, too. I have had to repeat myself so many times before they understand what I mean. The first thing I did was talk to the teachers and let them know that I was an international student. Since English is not my first language, I asked them if they could slow down a little bit during lecture. Most of them did not see any inconvenience in doing so, but if that did not work I usually record the lecture and listen to it once I get home. That actually helps a lot, with English but also mastering the material.

A look into her future

Hama plans to go to medical school. She has applied to the American University of Antigua and is awaiting a response. In her interview she was asked about her overall experience here and advice she would like to give to future international students coming here.

Q: How has studying abroad at UAFS affected you, good and bad?

A: Overall, the good and the bad together I would say they all helped shape the young lady I am today and they taught me some valuable lessons about life in general.

Q: If you could do it all over again, would you?

A: You bet I would, in a heartbeat.

Q: If you could give any advice to future international students, what would it be?

A: Hmm, I am not really good at this, but I will try. I would definitely tell them to be willing to accept change, learn and immerse themselves as much as possible in the culture here, ask for help whenever they need it, study

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hard, but also enjoy their experience as much as possible. Family is not just the people you are related to by blood, it can also be very special friends and people you interact with on a daily basis.

Q: When you think of UAFS, what instantly comes to mind?

A: *When I think of UAFS, I think family, education, experience and opportunity. I have been blessed in so many ways during my experience here.*

Congratulations!

The Office of International Relations would like to congratulate Rasila Soumana Hama for all of her accomplishments here on campus. Thank you for all that you have contributed to our office and the international program. You will be greatly missed.

