IHS grad heads to Rio de Janeiro on a Fulbright Award

By Colleen Michele Jones

People who remember Noa Krawczyk from her time at Irvington High School wouldn’t be surprised to learn that the 2008 graduate’s natural ambition and passion have opened many doors for her.

After earning a bachelor’s degree in biology from the Macaulay Honors College of the City University of New York (CUNY) in May 2012 as salutatorian of her class, Krawczyk recently won a prestigious Fulbright Award to study public health issues in Rio de Janeiro for nine months, beginning next month.

The Fulbright Program awards 8,000 grants annually toward graduate study and advanced research that contributes to the greater international good. Since its establishment by U.S. Sen. J. William Fulbright in 1946, 43 Fulbright alumni have gone on to win Nobel Prizes, while 78 have won Pulitzer Prizes.

Ten CUNY graduates, including Krawczyk, who studied at Hunter College, are recipients of a Fulbright scholarship this year. Macaulay Honors College students are selected for their outstanding high school records and leadership potential and receive free tuition, laptops, and a $7,500 grant to pursue global learning and service initiatives as undergraduates.

Speaking by phone with the Enterprise last Friday, Krawczyk, who lives in Tarrytown with her parents Leonor, a private Spanish teacher, and Hugo, a computer specialist, called it an “amazing opportunity.”

From an early age, Krawczyk has had a uniquely personal global perspective. Her Argentinean-born parents moved back and forth between Israel and New York, settling in Irvington when Noa was in seventh grade. The family — including older sister Liat, a 2005 alumna of IHS, and younger brother, Nir, who graduated in 2012 — also made regular visits to Argentina to see relatives.

It was on these trips that she became interested in different cultures, particularly Latin American populations with societal challenges. During her college years, Krawczyk spent a summer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where she volunteered at a community-based health organization that saw a lot of homeless and at-risk youth.

“We would give them food, baths, or hook them up with social workers,” said Krawczyk. “And that was the first time I really saw crack use in Rio.”

Krawczyk went on to explain that in a certain area of the city, there is a big divide between the affluent, tourist neighborhoods and a very impoverished population with mental health, family, crime, and other issues.

“There were teens who had ended up on the streets, using drugs,” said Krawczyk.

Interestingly, with the city hosting the FIFA World Cup of soccer in the summer of 2014 and the upcoming Summer Olympics in 2016, Rio de Janeiro has focused on efforts to clean up those streets.

Right after her CUNY graduation, Krawczyk returned to Rio on a public health research internship through the Mount Sinai International Exchange Program for Minority Students, surveying the political, psychological, and social implications of drug use, particularly among the nation’s young people, as well as policy and education options.