Stella Ogwu-Weekes is an honor student who was born and raised in Nigeria in a family of eight children. She graduated first in her class with an associate’s degree from the University's Hillyer College this past May. She will continue her studies at the College of Arts and Sciences as a junior this fall with a major in biology. Her goal is to become a pediatrician.

STELLA, WHAT DO YOU MISS MOST ABOUT NIGERIA?
I miss a lot of things. I miss my friends and my family and a sense of belonging to a people and to a particular place. When I go back home, I feel relaxed and safe. I feel like I belong.

WHAT'S THE MAIN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOING TO SCHOOL IN NIGERIA AND GOING TO SCHOOL IN THE UNITED STATES?
Interaction between teachers and students is much more formal in Nigeria. You don’t try to get to know teachers in any kind of personal way. You don’t stop by a teacher’s office and chat. Here in the United States, we have counselors, advisors—people you can talk to who can help you with problems that may come up. Teachers here are much more approachable.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD SO FAR?
The faculty and students have been very supportive and encouraging. Plus I’ve had great opportunities, like going with other Hillyer students to New Orleans during spring break to help with the cleanup efforts there.

HOW DID YOU DECIDE YOU WANTED TO BECOME A PEDIATRICIAN?
When I was growing up, I saw so many sick children in Nigeria. Children are the ones who suffer the most because they can’t really express how they’re feeling. Moms and dads try to be strong for their kids, but sometimes they can’t help. That’s when a doctor can step in. Helping the children is my priority.

WILL YOU PRACTICE MEDICINE IN THE UNITED STATES OR IN NIGERIA?
I’d like to go back and forth, but I’m looking forward to spending more time in Nigeria. There are good doctors in Nigeria but not enough of them. Not a lot of people can afford to go to medical school. Also, it’s still my home. I don’t want to neglect the people I left behind. I want to help the people I grew up with, the people who are part of my life and part of my country.