

USF's musical theatre summer intensive sparked Dade City native's journey to the country's best performing arts university.

Before her days of dancing and singing at the elite Carnegie Mellon University, one of the country's best performing arts schools, Amanda Smith was an undecided girl doing a summer intensive at Broadway Theatre Project in Tampa.

The then 18-year-old Dade City native was an average high schooler who dabbled in multiple extracurricular activities. Smith found herself involved in the Model United Nations, Environmental Club and various sports. Among her activities, Smith also did musical theatre. One of the first musicals she performed in was *Beauty and the Beast*, but was terrified for the audition. One of her friend's had to drag Smith's shivering body to the audition.

The moment that she really found her passion was in her performance of her school's production of *Cinderella* her junior year.

"I was singing on stage and there was just a moment where, you know, where you just don't want to do anything else" said Smith

Upon graduating from Pasco High School, Smith had secured a plan for a pre-medical degree and general theatre at Florida State University. Then, her vocal teacher informed her about a program called Broadway Theatre Project at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

The summer intensive program uses USF's facilities as the site for Broadway Theatre Project, as an outlet for those interested in pursuing musical theatre.

"It's intense," said Sadie Lehmker from the office of USF's School of Theatre. "It helps to hone your skills in such an intimate locale."

With her teacher's blessing, Smith attended the Broadway Theater Project which was held for four weeks the summer going into her freshmen year.

"Everything was challenging" said Smith. "We would get up at 6 in the morning to get to class at 7 or 8...and wouldn't be done with class, sometimes, until 11 p.m."

The next obstacle for Smith was to be around her new classmates. When comparing herself to her classmates Smith found herself feeling insecure, finding that her peers were more knowledgeable and

experienced in theater than she was.

At the end of the program, she began to prepare for college at FSU in the fall of 2011. She was still set on her plan of double majoring in general theatre and pre-med.

The drive she had for performing carried on into her college career. She studied general theatre and appeared in various shows for FSU's drama department before realizing that she didn't want to do a double major.

Smith realized the performing she did at FSU was not intense enough. She decided to fully commit to musical theatre.

She auditioned for various performing arts school, including FSU's Bachelor of Fine Arts musical theatre program.

FSU'S BFA accepted her. But things became clearer when out of 1700 people, she was among the twelve accepted to Carnegie Mellon University's BFA musical theatre program. The prestigious program, located in Pittsburgh, has crafted the talent of many performers who have gone on to achieve successful careers. Some famous alumni include cast members of NBC's *SMASH*, such as Megan Hilty and Christian Borle, as well as recent *Tony Award*-winner Billy Porter from Broadway's *Kinky Boots*.

Carnegie Mellon had been her dream school since she was in high school when she first heard about their program.

"I'm really lucky to go to the number one school for musical theatre," said Smith. "And have it actually be a possibility to do this as a career."

At Carnegie Mellon, Smith has found greater opportunities for success as well as skilled professors who know the business and have worked with some of Smith's idols.

According to Smith, not enough people realize how difficult the school days are for a musical theatre student. Weeks are occupied with singing, dancing, acting, and speech classes. Days go from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m..

"And that doesn't include rehearsals afterwards," said Smith, who rehearses until 2 a.m., doing her homework.

Smith has been intimidated by having to compete with her fellow peers, extremely talented performers. A challenge she will always face.

This challenge is one of the many obstacles to lead Smith to her ultimate goal of continuing to grow in her performance craft and establish an acting career on the west coast or performing on a Broadway or off-Broadway stage