

# **Final Reflection on My 2014 Summer Enrichment Experience at Columbia University**

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This summer, I got the opportunity to travel to Columbia University in New York City to participate in the High School Summer Program. The program provided the chance for high-achieving students to experience college life in the midst of the most populous city in America. Enrolled students could choose one area of coursework for the program's three-week duration, during which they experienced the academic rigor of an Ivy League institution. I was enrolled in Explorations in Genetics and Molecular Biology.

## **Putting Theory into Practice**

On weekdays, I attended my morning lecture class from 10 a.m. until noon. During these lectures, the class learned about the structures, functions and importance of DNA, RNA and other molecular structures.

After two hours in the classroom, we enjoyed a lunch break during which we could choose to eat in the dining hall or leave campus. I usually ate in the dining hall, as Columbia is actually known for having one of the best university cafeterias. After lunch, we headed to our afternoon class from 2 p.m. until 4 p.m. My afternoon class was held in one of Columbia's laboratory classrooms. Using the information that we learned during the morning lecture, we would perform various experiments that encouraged us to come up with our own solutions to problems rather than having the information simply handed to us.

One of my favorite labs involved gel electrophoreses to measure DNA fragments. We did another lab involving fly mutations, in which we mated wild-type and mutated flies and then examined the traits passed on to subsequent generations. The labs were so unique, fun and academically challenging. They offered a level of depth that you can't experience in a regular high school lab.

## **Seeing Sights and Forming Bonds**

After class, we had the freedom to roam around New York City on our own or go on trips that the residential advisors (RAs) planned for us. There were organized trips to see attractions like Central Park, Times Square, The Highline, and more. On one of these outings, I got to meet the person who runs the famous Humans of New York blog (and there's a picture to prove it)! There were also trips to see Broadway shows. I went to see Daniel Radcliffe's play, the *Cripple of Inishmaan*, and even got his autograph!

On my dormitory floor, there were three RAs. Each RA was assigned to a small group of students. Every night, my RA would sit us down in the hallway at curfew, and we would each discuss our day by playing a game called "Happy/Crappy," in which each of us would share what was good about our day and what was bad about it. All of us girls got so close, despite the

fact that each one of us was so different from the others. Even though we are all now back home, we still keep in touch and share our “happies” and “crappies” via our Columbia group chat.

### **Lessons Learned**

This program taught me so much more than I could ever have imagined. I not only learned about molecular biology, but I also learned about college admission, navigating the subway system and living independently—doing my laundry and keeping my room neat enough to work in (which was a real challenge). In addition, I made life-long memories and formed real friendships. Finally, I learned that setting a goal (such as getting accepted to Columbia for college) is a major motivating force in furthering in my studies and doing the best that I can. I will never forget the things that this adventure taught me.

As a result of this opportunity, I have become more interested in biology. And, if I get in, I think Columbia University will be my top choice for college.

I cannot thank the Garwin Family Foundation enough for the opportunity provided by sponsoring me to attend this enrichment program. I can honestly say that this was the best experience of my life so far.