

Final Reflection on My Summer 2023 Enrichment Experience at the University of Chicago

By Abdul Hadi

Entering the doors of the summer program at the University of Chicago, a gust of opportunity swept through, accompanied by the reassuring grasp of my grandma's hand. What resulted in the ensuing weeks was a journey of personal growth, academic challenges, and unforgettable experiences that expanded my horizons in ways I could never have imagined.

The initial challenge of my first week was adjusting to a daily schedule devoid of family interactions. As an only child, solitude was familiar, yet the complete absence of family felt new. The longing for walks with my grandma, playful moments with my cat, and the evening debriefs with my parents remained strong. Video calling bridged the gap and allowed me to maintain connections.

Transitioning to the academic realm, my experience was shaped by the program's rigorous curriculum. Due to the social events preceding the first day, I quickly made friends, forming lasting friendships within days. From competitive and exciting foosball matches to unforgettable conversations over lunch, I solidified bonds and crafted cherished memories. The university's sports facilities also became a hub of adventure, where basketball and soccer ignited shared passion.

The laboratory became my haven during the first week. The professor's daily lectures, followed by lab sessions, created an enticing learning experience. Unlike my experience in an AP Biology classroom, the abundance of time for experiments in UChicago Biology fostered comprehensive understanding. The program's invaluable resources bolstered my practical knowledge.

Having taken AP Biology, I noted the shift towards practicality in the program's emphasis. Pairing lectures with questions and readings while coupling labs with daily journals and inquiries improved my documenting skills. Learning to craft lab reports showcased the mastery of essential skills for higher education.

Week two unveiled heightened excitement. Summer session house games resulted in a soccer tournament, igniting competitiveness. A day off due to Juneteenth led to an impromptu beach adventure, a reminder of the program's enriching social aspect. Additionally, architectural boat tours under the city's light spoke to the immersive nature of the experience.

Week three proved to be the most significant. Presenting our "CRISPR and Sickle Cell Anemia" project marked a culmination of teamwork and dedication. Continuous refining and multiple presentations to TAs and the professor underscored the program's emphasis on feedback and improvement.

Regardless of the bonds made through the program, the final day was imminent; farewells weighed heavily as bonds forged over three weeks reached an inevitable crossroads.

The University of Chicago's immersive program presented many challenges and triumphs. The academic rigors challenged my intellect and time management. Collaborating in small groups underscored the significance of teamwork and diverse perspectives. Regular feedback honed my presentation skills and encouraged iterative improvement.

The residential experience fostered a sense of community. The program's faculty and students made the journey more exciting, contributing unique insights and moments of joy. Living on a university campus presented challenges, but the shared experiences forged lasting connections.

The program's location amidst the vibrant city of Chicago heightened the experience. The university's resources and gothic architectural theme provided a holistic academic and cultural immersion.

This transformative program helped direct my academic and career aspirations. The hands-on experience, intensive curriculum, and supportive community solidified my interest in the biological sciences. The exposure to cutting-edge techniques like CRISPR inspired my future academic pursuits.

I wholeheartedly recommend this program to future and current CCHS students. The immersion, joy, and academic rigor are unparalleled. The GFF scholarship empowered this journey, and I extend my gratitude to the Garwin Family Foundation for this transformative opportunity.

In closing, my three-week journey at UChicago combined growth, challenges, and lasting connections. As I step into the future, enriched and inspired, I carry with me the memories and knowledge forged during my remarkable journey.