

Final Reflection on My Summer 2023 Enrichment Experience at the Harvard University Pre-College Program

By Robert Wigfall

As you are aware, I have concluded my attendance at the Harvard Pre-College Program and my corresponding enrollment in their "Introduction to Ethics" course. My experience at Harvard could be described as nothing less than irreplicable. Though taking place over the course of two mere weeks, my time at Harvard was unique to any other academic experience of my life thus far. Just as easily as I was inserted into a campus of strangers, I emerged with friendships, knowledge, and memories to last a lifetime. Throughout my stay at this historic university, I met and made friends with people from all over the globe, underwent coursework designed to equip me with tools to enhance and clarify the process by which I problem-solve and question the world around me and the constructs that exist within it as support to its very existence, explored the greater Boston area, and partook in countless events and opportunities unique to my stay at Harvard.

Being what is arguably the most enjoyable aspect of my time at Harvard, the connections I made while in Cambridge were unmistakably a meaningful point of personal growth. As I spent a total of three weeks in Chicago, I was able to form social bonds, something I was committed to doing. Because my time in Cambridge was shorter than that of Chicago, being only two weeks, I made it a goal to step out of my comfort zone and meet as many people as I possibly could. I am proud to say I did just that. I was able to form connections with people on my floor, in my house, and in my class within a matter of days. Though not typically a person to be socially outgoing and extroverted, I found it quite effortless to make bonds while at Harvard, a behavior I believe stems from my cognizance of a commonality between everyone at the program. Regardless of who anyone was, where they're from, or what their reputation may have been in their hometown, we were all united in the fact that we take our academic lives seriously enough to spend our summer away from the comfort of our homes to pursue one way by which we can improve it. I met people from Turkey, Ukraine, Spain, Portugal, England, Greece, Bangladesh, Italy, New Zealand, Canada, Singapore, China, Germany, and all different corners of the United States of America. With the number of varying perspectives prevalent, I was able to learn quite a bit about many different sides of the world, their customs, and the personal experiences of those that possess them. For example, one of the people on my floor, Mykola, had to flee his homeland of Ukraine due to its current state of war, taking safety in Spain, where he awaits an email from the Ukrainian government sent to all 18-year olds requesting their support in their military efforts. However, before the day of his 18th birthday comes, he chose to spend his time at Harvard, pursuing the same opportunity as I. United in this pursuit, I couldn't help but be astonished and inspired by what Nick (Mykola) considered his normal life, something that brought light to the significance of this moment and commonality we were lucky to share. I don't intend to convey a sense of elitism or arrogance, but my stay at Harvard transitioned into something I'd be comfortable calling home.

Complete with the presence of amazing and relatable individuals at Harvard, was the significance of my coursework. Entitled "Introduction to Ethics," the objective of my class was to explore the different perspectives regarding morality. Through our ten days of class, we learned of Prudential

Theories, such as Hedonism, Preferentism, and Objective Theory. In addition, we covered Moral Theories, including Utilitarianism, Kantianism, and Virtue Ethics. Similarly, we also spoke of Meta-Ethical Theories, such as Nihilism, Determinism, and Relativism. For what was essentially a daily pattern, these theories were introduced to my class through lecture. Also included with each theory were the objections to it, producing a ground of discussion amongst my class, allowing my peers and me to voice our personal opinions on the theory and objections at hand. As Ethics is a field based heavily on discussion, our class was designed similarly, set up in a square, conference-style arrangement, in which we held discussions for the majority of class time. Throughout the course of these discussions, I was able to view, observe, and (sometimes) object to the diverse perspectives of others in my class. More often than not, someone would offer a view on a particular theory or issue that remained distant from my own school of thought. I soon began to notice a difference in my own thought processes, able to incorporate strategies of approaching or debating an ethical dilemma from those used by my peers. These discussions and debates were translated to the context of our assignments. Given nightly readings about the theories discussed in that day's class, we were assigned a corresponding writing in which we had more time to voice our personal opinions about numerous scenarios such as "The Experience Machine," "The Leaf Counter," and "The Trolley Problem." In a similar fashion, for our final assignment, we were given the freedom to select any topic covered through our coursework on which to do further research and write a 2000-word report. Persuaded by the theory of Nihilism, I wrote my paper about the practicality of Revolutionary Fictionalism, a type of Fictionalism which is a subsection of Expressivism, a type of Moral Nihilism, a Metaphysical theory that states that morality (good and bad) does not objectively exist within the world, but rather as a useful human construct.

Though satisfied with the coursework and interactions I had at Harvard, the historical significance of its campus was something that added to the experience. Legendary in the name itself, the ability to travel to Harvard's campus is something that many hope to do, a reason why it is open to the public, often flowing with tourists and tours of the historic grounds. In addition to the architecture and notoriety of the buildings, the fact that the place I was able to call home for a few weeks was a dream destination for a daily influx of people also assisted me in appreciating my being there. In addition to the infamous Harvard Yard, there also existed a plaza area that housed many food trucks and yard games, such as cornhole and ping-pong. If nothing else from this experience, I can at least report the fact that I've become a better ping-pong player, that being one of the many ways I met people at Harvard. Furthermore, I also explored Harvard Square, an area outside of campus holding many local shops and restaurants, including the best bagel I've ever had.

In addition to my attendance at class, I also attended several extracurricular and social events while in Cambridge. As a requirement of the program, each participant must complete a "Passport," a folder of eight events of their selection that they must attend during their stay. Divided into four groups, each student had to participate in two events of Academic Exploration, College Readiness, Social Events, and Residential Events. Completing my passport, I attended "Mixing Policy and Your Passions To Achieve Equity and Change the World," "What is the Physics of Materials That Build Themselves? A Review of Biological Self-Organization," "Keeping Up and Getting Ahead: Time Management for Success," "Who Am I and Who Will I Be?" "Pre-College Dance: Awkward Prom!" "Boston Trip," "Harvard Museum of Natural History," "Boba Social," and "Ice Cream Social." In addition to this, I did my best to explore campus with friends, going to several Harvard gyms, playing and hosting basketball tournaments in the basement of Lowell House (where I stayed), trying plenty of restaurants, riding the subway to Boston,

renting bikes to ride along the Charles River, attending game nights, and attending college advice sessions from Harvard undergraduates.

My time at Harvard is one I will never cease to desire to relive. I am so thankful for the ability to write and possess experiences about such a campus and university that one can only dream of attending. Though it plays a role, the prestige of being able to attend Harvard is not the aspect to which I can accredit my fond memories, rather the fact that I was able to discover traits whose existence I was ignorant of within myself. Throughout my time at Harvard University, I made many connections to people all over the world, but of those connections, the one that I am most excited to expand upon, is that which I found within myself.