

Final Reflection on My Summer 2023 Enrichment Experience at the New School's "Writopia" Lab

By Sydney Davis

Writopia Lab's Advanced Writing Seminar challenged me in many ways.

The program exposed me to an environment that was utterly foreign to me. Before attending Writopia Lab's residential workshop, I had never been to New York City. This pushed me out of my comfort zone to explore the busy streets of the Big Apple.

I had opportunities to read in front of my peers at a series of open mic nights. I read excerpts of poetry and short stories that I'd had in my portfolio but had never shared aloud. It was an experience unique to New York City's writing community, pushing me past my fears of reading my work aloud in front of others.

My workshop was eight students. The overall program was 26. This allowed for a very tightly-knit community. I opened up with my workshop members, sharing and critiquing during the workshop activities. I enjoyed the small-sized groups for that reason. By the end, the program became a community.

The feedback I received was invaluable. My instructor was a screenwriter and novelist, who gave feedback on my working screenplay and prose pieces. My small workshop, which was composed of many different types of writers, gave me constructive feedback on all of my writing too.

The program was rigorous and challenged me. The content of the program was incredible. I was exposed to a variety of writing and conversations with successful people in the writing community. The writing ranged from sketch comedy to a writing piece in conversation with another. Successful writers I met included:

- A professional sketch comedy writer for the Tonight Show.
- The Editor of Labyrinth Road (Penguin Random House in-print).
- A ghostwriter for the Hardy Boys series.

The program consisted of much more than writing. Excursions around New York City were organized as a part of this program. I explored the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Staten Island Ferry, Little Island Park, the outdoor theater in Harlem, and the streets and food of Manhattan. The purpose of this program was not only to give young writers a chance to write but to allow young people to explore one of the world's writing and publishing capitals.

My expectations of the program were greatly surpassed. I knew it would be an amazing experience, but I needed to figure out how I would feel about aspects of the creative industry, like publishing. This program also expanded what I knew about myself by sparking an interest in a job as a literary agent and helping me find a love for the big city.

At Writopia Lab's Advanced Writing Seminar I wrote a flash fiction/short story and edited several different pieces I'd written before but had not yet received feedback on. I'm very excited with both the concepts and drafts I came up with while at the program and look forward to revisiting them to explore further.

Overall, I felt very prepared while completing this program. While I learned things I didn't know, I had the background knowledge necessary to succeed.

My greatest accomplishment at Writopia Lab's Advanced Writing Seminar was pushing myself out of my "environmental comfort zone." Before attending this program, I had never been

alone in a big city, let alone in New York City. This was intimidating at first, but after a few days, I started to settle in and was able to appreciate the community I was now a part of.

The faculty members showed me what writing as a career could look like in all different venues. Initially, I thought the only job I could have in creative writing, was teaching, due to the competitiveness and complexity of publishing. However, having an instructor that regularly wrote for a book series and learning more about publishing allowed me to see that teaching was only one of the options for my career path.

The students in the program gave me a unique insight into different ways of life and writing styles. All of the other students in the program were from large cities. Most of them were from areas of New York City or Washington, DC. I learned about city living from them, and it put into perspective the benefits of living in a rural community and the obstacles I have. I found it interesting that the other students there could not drive and instead walked to school or took the subway.

My experience at Iowa last year helped prepare me for this student living experience. While the city was busier and took a while to get used to, I settled in within a few days. At first, the sounds and constant crowds and movement in New York were overwhelming. After daily exposure, I was as used to it as I could be by the end of the program. I would love to return to New York City and pursue a career or education there.

The residential experience was positive. I became good friends with my roommates by the end of the program. Due to the small size, it was easier to connect and communicate with them. We still speak and send each other our work.

I recommend this program for future Garwin students interested in writing, but more importantly, those that desire to explore an environment as unique as New York City.