

# **Final Reflection on My 2024 Summer Enrichment Experience at the University of Chicago Pre-College Summer Program**

*By Tanya Arun*

My experience at UChicago's Foundations of Psychological Research course has greatly expanded my knowledge of psychology. From having little experience to being able to form my own research design, this program has truly helped me learn about my field of interest.

In this course, I was assigned to create a research question and design an experiment to investigate it. My research focused on lucid dreaming, particularly the MILD (Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams) technique. MILD involves setting an intention to remember that one is dreaming while falling asleep, using memory cues and visualization to increase the likelihood of achieving a lucid dream. I wanted to explore how practicing this technique could impact creativity in adults. To investigate this, I chose a between-subjects design, which would divide participants into two groups: one that received training in the MILD technique and another that did not. Both groups would complete creativity assessments before and after the intervention, allowing me to measure any changes in creativity that could be associated with the MILD technique. This design would allow me to examine the potential effects of lucid dreaming on creative thinking, showing how such practices might enhance creative abilities. Using this design, I created a research proposal and presentation to inform others of my idea.

One of the challenges I faced during the course was collaborating effectively in small groups. This required not just cooperation but also a deep understanding with my peers' ideas. We were tasked with critiquing each other's research questions, which led to insightful discussions. These exchanges helped with my own question, allowing me to think critically about my own ideas and consider other perspectives. This collaborative process was important in helping me develop a better understanding of everyone's research and how they view my own. Additionally, receiving feedback from instructors was another academic challenge presented by the program, since I had to figure out a way to incorporate that in my design. The constructive criticism I received was very impactful. It guided me in specifying my research question on lucid dreaming techniques, specifically focusing on the MILD technique. This feedback was important in making my research question more specific and testable. These interactions showed me the importance of being open to critique and using it as a tool for improvement.

I gained valuable knowledge from the program's curriculum, which covered various research methodologies. Each week, we had to understand complex concepts and use them in our research proposals. Although it was challenging, it also helped me develop a better understanding of research methods and how they can be applied to psychological inquiries.

The program's workload required a lot of mental effort and critical thinking, even though there weren't many tasks. Each assignment, and discussion, was meant to challenge us and make us think deeply. Even though there were only a few tasks, they needed careful analysis and thoughtful engagement. Creating a research proposal and presentation required careful planning and prioritization to stay focused and organized. Through this experience, I learned important lessons in time management, finding a way to balance intellectually demanding tasks while still producing high-quality work.

When I started the program, I was really interested in psychology, which made it easier for me to get into the content right away. However, I found that the new terms and methods were more difficult than I expected. I not only had to learn these new concepts, but also apply them to my research in meaningful ways. This meant I had to put in extra effort, spending more time studying and reviewing the material to make sure I understood it completely. Despite the challenges, my interest in psychology kept me motivated and engaged throughout the program.

One of my biggest achievements in the program was creating a clear research question and designing a strong study, despite not having a deep understanding of psychological research beforehand. I decided to focus on the MILD technique in lucid dreaming and its impact on creativity, which was a new and complex topic for me. Narrowing down my research question and developing a detailed research proposal successfully was a significant milestone. This accomplishment was especially rewarding given my limited experience in the field and represented a major academic achievement as I worked through the complexities of psychological research design.

The instructor and TA played a crucial role in enhancing my program experience. Their knowledge in psychology offered valuable perspectives on research, and their friendly approach made it easy to ask for help. One highlight was the instructor's thoughtful gestures, like baking cookies and bringing popcorn to class, which created a friendly atmosphere and made the academic challenges easier to handle. My classmates also contributed to the fun atmosphere of the program. Coming from diverse backgrounds, they brought unique perspectives to class discussions, which broadened my understanding of psychology. The strong connections I formed with them improved both the academic and social aspects of the program.

Living on a university campus was a new experience for me. While I had some expectations about campus life, the actual experience exceeded them. I quickly adapted to the new environment and found the dorms to be comfortable and helpful for both studying and socializing. However, managing my time effectively between the assignments from the class and the social opportunities that came with living on campus was a challenge. Additionally, I encountered some technical issues with my computer, which made completing assignments like video editing more time-consuming and stressful than I had anticipated. The residential

experience added a large amount of value to the program by creating a sense of community among my classmates. Living in close proximity to my friends allowed us to collaborate more effectively on projects and study together. This shared living experience created a supportive environment that enhanced both my academic performance and personal growth.

The program at the University of Chicago was made even better by the beautiful campus and lively academic environment. The architecture of the buildings was something I greatly enjoyed. Being in Chicago also gave us the chance to enjoy the city's cultural attractions, like the architectural boat tour and Navy Pier fireworks. These experiences made the program memorable, turning it into more than just an academic experience. The speedboat tour was one of my favorite memories. We were able to see the city from the water, and the nighttime scenery of the fireworks was a great sight to see.

Reflecting on my time in the program, I would highly recommend it to future students. The program offers an academic experience that is both challenging and rewarding. The opportunity to engage with psychology research, collaborate with peers, and receive guidance from knowledgeable faculty makes it a valuable experience for anyone interested in the field. The program had a large impact on me, solidifying my interest in pursuing psychology research as a future career. The knowledge I developed in designing experiments, analyzing data, and presenting research will be of great help in my academic journey. The experience also gave me a clearer understanding of the research process, which I plan to build upon in future studies and potentially in a career in psychological research. Personally, I grew in several ways throughout the program. I became more confident in my ability to manage time and handle multiple tasks under pressure. My communication skills improved, particularly in presenting complex ideas in a clear and engaging manner. The experience also taught me the importance of adaptability and resilience, especially when facing challenges like technical issues or tight deadlines.

Looking back on those three weeks, the program had a profound impact on me, deepening my passion for psychology. The experience of working closely with people with similar interests to mine helped me develop a greater appreciation for collaboration. I hope to use the knowledge I learned to create research designs in the future that can hopefully positively impact the lives of others. Whether you are passionate about psychology or simply curious about research, this program provides a strong foundation for future academic and career pursuits, and I hope to do a similar program again.