

Final Reflection on My 2024 Summer Enrichment Experience at the Michigan Math and Science Scholars Program

By Addison Krotz

Receiving this scholarship from The Garwin Family Foundation was beyond anything I could have imagined. When it was confirmed that I would be attending The University of Michigan, anxiety weighed heavily on me until the moment I arrived. As someone who tends to overthink everything, this opportunity was unlike anything I had ever experienced. However, that anxiety quickly disappeared the moment I walked up the dorm building stairs.

Throughout my stay, we participated in one to two activities each day. We worked in groups of four or more, as each activity involved multiple steps that could be divided among the group members. Two activities stood out to me the most. One involved analyzing our fingerprints. Everyone in the class wrote their name on the back of each of their prints, which were then scattered around a table. We had to collaborate as a class to match each pair of fingerprints. The second notable activity was the crime scene analysis. Each person developed their own theory, and after discussing and exchanging thoughts on what might have happened to the victims, we arrived at a final solution. It was incredible to see everyone in the class working together to find the same solution, especially given that at Herrin High School, many students don't put much effort into class projects and labs.

During my two weeks, I had two homework assignments. This was my first experience working out physics problems. While the assignments weren't extremely difficult, they definitely made me question my decision to take a physics course. However, after discussing the problems with some classmates who were also struggling, we collaborated and figured out the solutions together. Once I grasped the concepts, solving the problems became really enjoyable.

One of my favorite aspects of the program was meeting new people. The class was incredibly engaging, and the people were delightful to be around. Our teacher played a significant role in creating a positive learning environment. He was always in a good mood and ready to teach, which helped me be prepared to learn every day. He organized

competitions with small prizes for the winning group, which added an element of fun. I particularly enjoyed building a relationship with him; he was approachable and shared ideas about what we could do during our time there as well as his own experiences. If he noticed a student struggling during a demonstration, he would explain it in more detail until they understood before continuing.

I initially worried that my social anxiety would hinder my experience, but all my worries vanished the moment I walked into class on the first day. I came out of my shell, participated in discussions about the crime scenes, and helped other groups when they were confused. Everyone in the class was kind and understanding, but I grew especially close to five girls with whom I talked the most. We worked together on everything and became close friends.

The last day of the program was one of the saddest experiences I've ever had. Despite knowing we were leaving, no one wanted to accept it. We made ice cream and received certificates of completion. Our teacher, Ramon, asked each student for their favorite song and played it to introduce us to different cultures and music from around the world. After class, everyone lingered and chatted for about thirty minutes. Ramon told us that we were one of his favorite classes he had taught in a while. We said our goodbyes, and the tears began to flow. My friends and I hugged and made a promise to keep in touch, despite living all over the globe. We now share daily videos and updates about our lives. Although it's sad to think that I might not see most of my friends in person again, I am grateful for having met them and for our continued connection.

This opportunity transformed my life. It helped me become a better version of myself, improving my ability to interact with others and altering my outlook on the world. Having friends from places like Switzerland taught me so much. I thoroughly enjoyed the forensic aspects of the class, and once I understood it, I also grew to appreciate the physics component. I am immensely thankful for this experience, which I will cherish and talk about for years to come. Overcoming my fears and pushing myself to do something that initially terrified me has been incredibly rewarding.