

Final Reflection on My 2024 Summer Enrichment Experience at Awesome Math

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An Overview of the Summer

This year was both my first year of Garwin Family Foundation and my first year of taking any summer program, so this was a very new, yet incredibly fun, experience.

To prepare for my Algebra 2.5 class, I took Algebra 1.5 the month before, in June. It was an interesting class that prepared me for some of the concepts covered in Algebra 2.5 and got me to start thinking “smart”.

The first week of Algebra 2.5, I was prepared for the format of AwesomeMath by Algebra 1.5, and I was ready to get started. This week was the easiest for me because it just went more in-depth on topics covered in Algebra 1.5, but just because it was the easiest does not mean that it was easy. The homework was challenging, but not so bad as to where I couldn't make reasonable progress on it. The other students in the class also made it a more fun experience with plenty of jokes shared in the video call chat, a lot of which made me laugh. Finally, for the first test that we took, I did slightly below the class average, but still much better than what I expected. So overall, this was a good week for me. I learned, I got challenged, and I did well on a test. This was also the week where I went to SIU's firework celebration which was a lot of fun.

The second week of Algebra 2.5 started off the same, where I could easily understand the material but quickly new problems arose. Mainly, the homework. The teaching assistants at this time decided that since our class did really well on average on the first test, we should be getting harder homework. So, homework went from maybe 30 minutes to an hour to complete to over four hours of work just to do one problem. This was very unexpected for me, but I did my best to push through the struggle and finish the homework. I started going to office hours, as I had passed my driver's exam and therefore had no more summer driver's ed, freeing up my morning hours. I also discovered something new that was extremely useful for me which was the class Discord. I hadn't used it the first week, but in the class Discord I asked some questions I had on the homework and was also able to see the hints other people got from asking questions that I had. This made the homework slightly easier, but it was twice as difficult as the first week. All of these challenges, however, led to me doing really well on the second test. I was able to score a couple of points above the average score, and the only question I didn't answer was a question nobody but one person got right, and that one person had seen the question before. It was a very challenging but rewarding second week.

Moving into the last week of AwesomeMath, things got a lot more challenging. Because our class did even better on the second test than the first, our instructor thought that we were ready to move closer to the next level, Algebra 3.5, and start doing more proof-based lectures. That meant that not only did the homework get harder to do, but the lectures got harder to understand. For the first four days, I was able to understand the lectures and, by asking questions to the teaching assistants and my classmates, was able to do reasonably well on the homework. This was also the week where I participated the most during the lectures. I had been contributing the past two weeks, but I had some worries about answering the questions wrong and it being seen by the entire class. This third week, however, I lost that anxiety and started contributing a lot to the discussions. Then, the hardest day in the entire course, the last day, happened. I felt as if I had understood everything in the lecture completely, but I was extremely lost in the problem-solving session, and I was asking constant questions to the teaching assistants to try and understand the steps that my classmates were doing. I eventually got part of it down, and I did study it on my own time after the class ended, but the last day was by far the hardest.

A couple of days after the class ended, the same week I left on vacation to North Carolina, I received the course completion certificate, marking the end of my AwesomeMath Summer Program journey. I also ordered some math textbooks off of a discount that AwesomeMath gave me, giving me more material to study during the school year.

Overall, I really enjoyed this class. I was able to learn a lot of math that will help me in competitions with my math team this upcoming year, and I was able to meet some new people online who are very smart in math. However, the most important thing that I took away from the class was the ability to think smart. No matter how many concepts one can learn, if they don't know how to use this concept creatively then they won't be able to use it in many math competitions. This idea of thinking creatively is what the class was trying to accomplish, in my opinion. Many topics were already well-known by the entire class, yet the homework was hard for everyone because the problems challenged us to think outside of the box to apply what we learned to solve the problem. I believe that I was able to pick some of the techniques that we learned in class to think creatively and what to look for to know when to use what technique, but the best way to pick it up is from constant practice and repetition. So, that's what I'm going to do after this class. I am going to constantly study using the materials and techniques that I was taught in this class while trying to think creatively.

Thank you, Garwin Family Foundation, so much for showing me that there are fun and challenging summer programs out there that I can take, and for sponsoring me to go to AwesomeMath. It was an awesome summer, and I hope I will be able to find another class next year where I will have just as much fun.