

Final Reflection on My 2024 Summer Enrichment Experience at the University of Chicago Summer Immersion Program

By Myra Anderson

The University of Chicago Summer Immersion program was an incredible program that I am very grateful to have attended. Over my 3 weeks on campus, I was met with many different challenges academically, socially, and emotionally. One of the first challenges that I was met with when I arrived was that my Chromebook was unable to connect to UChicago's WIFI. I even met with the tech bar and they explained that their WIFI system around campus could not be supported on ChromeOS, except for the WIFI at the Regenstein Library. For the first few days of the program, I had to spend a couple hours at the library doing homework. To combat this, I was able to work it out with my parents to get a laptop by the first weekend. A social challenge that I faced was finding friends without having a roommate. I found out that I was in a single dorm room when I arrived. This caused me to be a little bit anxious about connecting with others. However, it turned out well because the first couple nights, I decided to go sit in the lounge room and I was able to make friends. We played some card games and we were able to bond over it. It really helped when we got to go to our classes for the first time because I met some people that I could talk to in class. They ended up becoming my closest friends.

Academically, I felt that the course was nicely paced. The lectures had a lot of information, but I was able to keep up, especially because of the assignments. With every lecture, we had a short reading, and 6-question quiz that reviewed the main topics of the lectures. Even when I was confused on a topic, the professor was really good at answering questions, in class and even during office hours. The final project was also a challenge because I had a new perspective of researching a subject. When we did research, it was a more advanced level of understanding than I have ever had to do. The topic we chose was very specific so we had to spend a lot of time finding reliable information. Additionally, I had to learn in-depth pathways in cell communication which can quickly become complex. Within this project, I had to use small group skills to communicate with my classmates. I was in a group of 3 and I was lucky to have really good group mates. Most of our work was individual but we kept each other updated. A couple times we even met outside of class to work at the library.

The content of the program covered a similar amount of information to AP Biology. I have not taken the course myself, however, my classmates who had already completed it, told me that the course work was similar. For some students in the course, it was a little monotonous and it was clear to see which students had taken AP Biology and which ones had not. For me, I was completely satisfied with the information we covered. Specifically, Dr. Bednarczyk put an intense focus on microbiology while we learned about everything. This was mainly due to the fact that our lab work was focused on microbes. Additionally, our professor focused on cancer cells for a couple days. I have always wanted to study cancer so this was very interesting to me. Cancer is such a complex topic that there was no way we could cover every aspect of it. Dr. B studied cancer in his undergrad years so he was very knowledgeable on the topic. This was beneficial because we were able to ask him many questions about it.

I really enjoyed my professor because he was passionate about his teaching and he did an incredible job of answering students' questions. He frequently asked to make sure that we

had no questions over the material and he asked us questions to challenge us to think and recall information. Dr. B returned emails in a timely manner which was incredibly helpful. Additionally, while we were completing our presentations, he helped us choose topics that were specific and relevant to the class. I enjoyed getting some feedback on our presentation. Outside of time with my professor, I listened to many guest speakers that shared their knowledge and their journey to where they are now. The most impactful speaker that I listened to was Dr. Izumchenko. He shared his experience as a translational researcher. I will forever remember his presentation and the impact it had on me. He has persuaded me to go to medical school to become an MD before I enter the research field. He recommended this because it will provide me room to move around in my career.

This course was something that I felt readily prepared for and I loved it. One thing I did learn is that biology is such a diverse and broad area of study. There are so many different ways to observe life and there are so many different types of life to learn about. This is why I think I want to major in Biochemistry. It seems like it is a topic that I would enjoy especially since I was enrolled in AP Chemistry during my junior year. It was not my most favorite class, but I did enjoy it and I scored well on the AP test. In terms of the rest of the program, I was well equipped to be at the program. This time, I did not over pack so I felt pretty confident in staying on my own. I had no issue staying in the dorms. I made sure that I did my laundry at the end of each week and I did my best to keep my room clean. Although being in a single dorm was not the best for making friends, I enjoyed having the privacy at my convenience. One thing that will be memorable was that my floor was only on the second floor. Since the building was a 16-floor building, that meant that I used the stairs to get to my room. It was not really an inconvenience because the elevator was always busy, rather than it meant I got a lot of walking time in.

Around campus I walked a lot, there was one UChicago campus bus, however, it was not a practical option to get around campus because it drove a large amount of area. Instead, I walked almost everywhere. My class was about 16 minutes away from our dorms which was not bad at all. The library was right next to our building so the walk was about the same. In terms of using the campus for academic purposes, the longest walk was around 16 minutes. The first week they took us on a target trip in case we needed anything. I did not need anything but I went because it was nice to know where it was. That was a 30-minute walk which was one of the longest walks I took. Close by there were a lot of restaurants and little shops that I went back to try once. If we were not walking somewhere we used the Lyft bikes. There were two options, a normal bike and the e-bikes with e-assist. I used them a handful of times. The main time I used them was to get into downtown Chicago on the weekend. The other times I used them to go to places like Target which were farther away than most of campus. Getting around on a college campus is something you have to get used to. It is important to walk with a purpose so that you make it to class on time. Another thing you have to watch for is cars. They do not always stop when they are supposed to so it is important to watch out. This was not really new information to me, rather it was something that I had to remind myself of.

The UChicago Summer Session provided me with the most realistic college experience I could have gone through before I will enter college next year. We were given a lot of responsibilities on our own part, such as getting to class on time, going places on our own, and taking care of ourselves and our rooms. The only restriction that we were given was a mandatory curfew at 10 pm. We had to complete a check-in every night before 10 pm so that

there were no disciplinary actions taken. This did not mean we had to feel or be alone though, because the RA's were very kind and wanted to help us navigate through difficult situations. They also planned weekly events such as painting, bracelet making, and movie nights. On the weekends, the summer session held big events for students to get around the city and experience it. I attended the trip to see a Chicago Fire soccer game, SIX at the James M. Neanderthal Theatre, architecture boat tour, FIELD museum, and a couple other events. They were so much fun and I got to see so much of what Chicago has to offer. Outside of these trips, I explored the city with some of my friends. The day we went downtown we did an escape room, went to Portillo's, mini golfed, and rode the Centennial Wheel at Navy Pier. It was honestly incredible.

As a residential program I got so much from it because it really felt like I was a college student attending UChicago. Even though the city was something new for me, I felt like I adapted well to it and I was able to get a feel for it. It is not somewhere that I would want to live my whole life, but spending some college years in the city would be incredible. It did help immensely that the campus was in the suburbs of Chicago rather than downtown. It was a more relaxed environment and did not have as much traffic and pedestrians. That made it very enjoyable to live in. By the third week I did miss my car a little bit, but I could have stayed longer without complaining too much.

I would highly recommend this program to any future GFF students. I would not really recommend the course I took simply because most schools around Carterville offer AP Biology and it might be a little repetitive. Given this, there were other biology courses such as Biotechnology and Neuroscience courses that I heard really great things about. The diversity of the courses they offered was really interesting because I met so many people that had vastly different interests. This program was definitely one for rising junior and senior aged students, however, I did meet some exceptional rising sophomores that did excellent in the program. The program would be a good fit for students who are mature enough to navigate a new area on their own and who show the ability to take care of themselves incredibly well. Any student who is willing to put in hard work would succeed in any of the courses. It was truly a great pre-college program to attend.

My time at UChicago has really provided me with the groundwork for what I want to pursue in life. Like I mentioned before, I believe that I want to major in biochemistry. The next thing is that I will most likely go to medical school to become an MD and afterwards enter the translational research field. I would like to get involved in research that will produce a result that could help millions of people. This would not only enable me to complete my research, but I could always go back to doing clinical work with patients.

Something I learned about myself is my ability to adapt to my surroundings. Within the first two days of the program, I had gotten into the groove of doing things and I felt at home with the campus. I was even able to help other students navigate life by helping with laundry and other things. I really love to help other people when they are faced with challenges that I know how to handle, that is why I plan to be an RA during my college career.

In summary, I loved my experience at the University of Chicago. There are so many exciting things about college that people never really mention to high school students. I met a group of amazing people that were really involved in their learning and also their social lives. This made it fun and enjoyable to be around them and work with them. My class challenged me

in ways that I had never thought I would be and I grew in my understanding of biology over the 3 weeks. There was just so much to see, do, and learn so I did my best to do it all. One thing that I will carry with me is that although the college experience is something I truly look forward to, I am glad that I get one more year in high school. I intend to apply to the University of Chicago this year as a senior and if that is where I end up going, I will be excited to continue my journey there. Thank you, Garwin Family Foundation for the most incredible summers.