

Bard College at Simon's Rock YWW Final Report

My time at Bard College at Simon's Rock's Young Writer's Workshop can be described in three words: school but better. However, I'll describe it in one thousand, four hundred and seventy instead. My time at YWW was structured much like a normal school day, with classes beginning in the early morning and ending at 3. The day was split into three sessions, with refreshing breaks in the morning for snacks and in the afternoon for lunch. An entire school day of just my favorite subject truly allowed my writing skills to bloom, and although I was feeling pretty burnt out by the end of the day, plenty of free time filled with extracurricular events provided a nice recharge for the next day of classes. These events were great opportunities to connect with fellow students and enjoy myself. When I wasn't participating in fun events, though, I truly grew in my creative writing skills through my classes. However, following three weeks in the program, I can't say that it was particularly challenging. That's definitely not a bad thing, though. While students in Math or Science programs might run into tough new theorems or equations that encourage them to grow, I think that programs in creative writing should aim to boost a student's creativity and inspire new creations, rather than stump them with a complicated prompt. The prompts at this camp always encouraged our creativity to run wild, as reflected by my instructor's persistent response to my questions, "The answer's always yes." Throughout my time, I felt very creatively engaged and didn't struggle to come up with new things to write about. Each prompt I was given quickly set my pen moving, and I had no trouble completing my homework assignments. Often, I was inspired to just keep writing, and you could often find me scratching away at my notebook in the only air-conditioned building on campus.

The most challenging part of the program, however, was gathering the courage to speak up in small group discussions. Classes often followed a certain format that allowed us to have

plenty of fuel for these conversations. Our instructor, Sean Mills, would begin the morning class by introducing a new piece of writing and a corresponding prompt. We would then spend the rest of the class writing a short piece that followed that prompt. Then, we would spend the next period reading our pieces to the group of twelve students and receiving feedback. I had a pretty tough time working up the courage to speak in these meetings, but the great feedback and validation that I got when I finally spoke made the stress more than worth it. Getting to hear my classmates' ideas and flavorful language helped to fuel my own budding creativity. After those nerve-racking discussions, our third class session would usually be spent with the introduction of another, longer prompt to work on as homework. This homework was assigned in small amounts that usually took only half an hour to complete, but I felt plenty motivated to keep writing in my spare time, where I spawned some of my best work. Of course, this schedule became a bit skewed when large group sessions were factored in, but it generally followed this structure. I simply loved this style, because it allowed for plenty of creative inspiration as well as feedback from fellow students. Where I really improved, though, was in the feedback that I received from my instructor during our one-on-one conferences each week. These conferences would consider our three best pieces of the week, and each word of feedback was extremely beneficial to my writing. For example, I handed in one piece of writing that I enjoyed but was also confused about how to improve, and Mr. Mills suggested that I change the speaker for a more cohesive story. I did, and even decided to include the final, polished piece in my final portfolio, which included three of my best pieces from the camp. Overall, while my classes weren't traditionally challenging, they encouraged creativity in each exercise and left me with plenty of areas for improvement.

My goal in attending this camp was simply to expand and enrich my love of creative writing. With all of my academics and extracurriculars, I don't often have the time to just sit down and write. Or, if I do, I often spend that time on "easier" hobbies such as watching TV, or reading literature already written. Therefore, my goals were easily met at Bard, where I felt more motivated to sit down and write than ever before. My greatest accomplishment, though, is writing the first three chapters of a story that I've had knocking around in my head for a while. It was wonderful to finally put all of my ideas to the page and begin to work out a cohesive and satisfying story, and I wouldn't have been able to do that without the motivation and validation Bard gave me. A lot of the validation came from my peers, in fact, who constantly praised my work both in and out of class. Since my roommate and I happened to be in the same small group and therefore had the same instructor, a lot of this praise and critique came from her. Misha's late-night input allowed me to feel more confident in my submissions, and the two of us grew pretty close this way. She was a great roommate, and I was definitely glad that I wasn't staying alone, especially because Misha brought a giant fan. The fact that the dorms had no air conditioning is one of my few complaints. The dorms were also quite old and slightly dirty in the frequently used common areas, such as the bathrooms. Besides the muggy buildings, the campus was quite beautiful. Nestled in the picturesque Berkshires, I enjoyed scenic walks to my classes and breathtaking views of the unsullied sky at night. However, I would not recommend taking the forty-five-minute walk to town at the height of the heat, for I was truly regretting my choice of program then. The campus is a bit too old-fashioned for me, but, then again, no other Garwin student will have to deal with it as the program will be held at a different campus next year.

As for whether I would recommend this program to other Garwin students, I'm not sure. The location, in relation to its small size and proximity to town, and poor dorm facilities is

definitely a negative, in my opinion. However, the classes were everything that I wanted them to be, and helped me to meet each goal that I set. I truly felt fulfilled from my time there. However, it was sort of aggravating that my best work came outside of class, as I had some gripes with my instructor's teaching style. I felt that we spent way too much time on discussion, and there was some controversy on the instructor's choice of teaching material. Although I was a little frustrated, I'm happy with what I've done at YWW in the end. I haven't loved this program enough to do it again, though, and I will definitely choose a shorter program that's closer to home next year. However, I had no problems with being academically prepared, and I don't think any future Garwin students will either.

My time at YWW has definitely inspired me to continue writing my novel in my free time. It gave me the spark I needed to start writing and truly feel confident in it, thanks to my teacher's generous praise of the chapter that I submitted. My plans remain the same; pursue a stable career that I enjoy, while still allowing time to write as my true passion. I've truly grown as a writer, in my creative abilities, confidence, and motivation to meet my goals. I'll hold on to the pieces I've written here, including the first chapters of my novel, as I move forward with my writing. Hopefully, one day, you'll even be able to see my face on the cover of a best-selling novel. Who knows? Maybe you'll even read it and get to enjoy my stories for yourself. I have only one more thing to say to future Garwin scholars. If you can, do a program with a fellow Garwin student. I got to spend three fun weeks with Reka this summer, and can now count her among my close friends. We even got to enjoy an eight-hour wait at the airport and a two-hour flight to Chicago together. In conclusion, my time here has been extremely enlightening and impactful. While it wasn't without its flaws and discomfort, I can truly say that I'm glad I came. Thank you so much for providing me with this amazing opportunity!