

## Final Reflection on My 2025 Summer Enrichment Experience at Washington University Research Development Institute

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This is a class, as indicated by its name, heavily focused on research. Specifically, the presentation of it to others. Throughout this class, we covered various techniques to effectively analyze and present our findings. These included looking over primary and secondary sources, notes on what to look for while analyzing (repeated elements, contrasting elements, etc.), how to effectively look for sources to back your argument up, how to build an argument without fallacies, how to structure a thesis to be defensible and specific, and some other smaller details along the same lines. Unexpectedly, this class flows more like an English class than anything else. Most of the techniques we went over in this class were ideas that had been brought up in English class, or, at least, the basics were brought up in English, and the ways we practice analyzing and interpreting sources was by reading short stories and looking at advertisements before discussing them, something that is done a lot in English. That is not to say that this class doesn't teach you anything new; some of the analysis techniques we talked about were brand new, and it was fun to look over some past content in the light of researching, but it definitely shared a lot of elements with an English class. However, unlike English, where most assignments have a defined boundary of what one can research for an assignment, this class allowed us to pick whatever we wanted to dedicate our time to, which was a really nice touch and made this class a lot more interesting.

Now, with respect to the workload, this class assigned a lot more work, especially given the two weeks we had to complete it, compared to high school English. I had a similar experience to Seth, where, in two weeks, I wrote about as much as I would have written in a quarter of English. However, unlike English, assignments are not graded based on grammar, word choice, or other semantics that might be a focus in writing analytically in English class. In this institute, the grading process and comments of advice that the professor gave were focused on how your ideas would strengthen/weaken your argument, and places where you could further extend your research to improve your claim further. Our professor is a worldly man and, from what I saw from my assignments and some of my classmates, he was able to give advice on other topics to look into on a wide variety of topics, meaning that people could learn a lot on any topic by following his advice.

For the final presentation, like the other major assignments in the class, the grading was not based as much on the quality of your transcript and presentation, but more so on how we dealt with the Q&A session after our presentation. The professors, of course, wanted us to have a clear and concise presentation outlining the work we had done over the two weeks, but they really wanted us to show an extended understanding of our topic by effectively answering questions about it.

Finally, I wanted to bring up the one misgiving I had about this class, at least for the first week, that I wished I had known about going into it. This class favors people researching the humanities more than purely scientific research due to the fact that we

had to find an interpretation of the sources we read. Purely scientific, like I had originally thought with wormholes, is extremely difficult. Due to this, I had to switch to a more humanities-based approach to looking into theoretical objects, looking into Interstellar. Most of the projects in our class were humanities based, so this is an important detail to know before going into the program. After finishing, I did not really mind this because getting an interpretation of what I had read is extremely important for critical thinking and analysis skills, a key component of the class, but for the first couple of days, it rubbed me the wrong way.

Overall, this class is good for people looking to improve their analytical and presentation skills. It flows very similarly to English classes, but still has its unique quirks that make it worth it. While I gained a lot of experience from this class about analytical work, I would say that the most important skill I gained, class wise, was time management skills. Due to the hypercondensed nature of the class, I could not afford to procrastinate assignments, and often did not have the time to as assignments were due only a couple of days after being assigned. It's a very good course, and I highly recommend it for gaining experience in analytical writing and researching personalized topics.

### **The Social Aspect**

This program was extremely fun, and a big part of it was the open nature of the program socially. There was an evening event almost every single day of the program, which was always extremely popular, and they covered a really wide range of activities, from volleyball to geoguesser, so it's almost a guarantee that one of the events appealed to someone in the program. I attended as many as I could, keeping the workload in mind, and I had a great time at all of them. The program also promotes exploring the city, with out-of-campus travel being permitted from 5 PM - 9 PM during the week and 9 AM - 9 PM on the weekends, and shuttle passes were provided to make travel as easy as possible. This resulted in me and a couple of friends going out to eat on the Delmar loop a couple of times, which had a lot better food than what was offered at the DUC (though, now that I'm on the topic of the DUC, some of their food is pretty good, and their employees are really nice, I got a free drink a couple of times from them which was nice). There are also a lot of sports facilities on campus, meaning that no matter the sport, there was a place to practice it, like when I went to play tennis with my roommates. The campus is also incredibly beautiful, and a really safe area, making it perfect for early morning or evening runs.

The dorms also promoted interaction between rooms. There were study areas and lounges on each floor, and the room curfew was only at 11 PM, which gave us a lot of time to socialize with other students, even students in different programs entirely. This led to stuff like playing Scrabble with another room almost every evening, learning card games from another room, and practicing my presentation with others.

Then, of course, the general college lifestyle. I didn't quite know what to expect going into the program, but I am so glad I went to an in-person program and learned what it was like to sleep in a dorm, meet roommates, make new friends, walk to classes, and deal with the mediocre food. It was really nice to experience all of this, and this, combined with the community aspect of living in a dorm, became my two biggest takeaways from the program, and I think my greatest benefit in attending WashU.

**Reflection**

This program is a great one, both for the rigorous course work and the college experience on a beautiful campus, and I would highly recommend it, much much more than I would an online program.

Now, a couple of weeks after the program, I received my transcript, officially stating that I passed the program.