

Final Reflection on My 2026 Summer Enrichment Experience at the Michigan Math and Science Scholars Program

by Isabella Dai

My experience at the University of Michigan was filled with new opportunities and friendships. This was my first time at a residential camp, and although I was initially nervous about being so far away from home, I ended up having a great time. This program really helped me get an understanding of college life and what it was like to learn in a college environment. The UofM campus is beautiful, and I always enjoyed the walk to and from classes. The counselors and instructors were all super kind and helpful, and I felt very safe and comfortable during this program.

On the first day, I was excited but also nervous about meeting new people. I have never been great at starting conversations or making friends, so living on a college campus with students whom I did not know felt scary and intimidating. The program had a rule where if you left the dorms, you had to stay in a group of at least three people. I was worried that I would be alone and would not be able to find two other people to walk with. However, as the program went on, I became more comfortable talking with people and stepping outside of my comfort zone. That evening, I joined a group of people for dinner and formed many new friendships that lasted even after the program was over. By the end of the camp, I found myself talking to people I probably would not have approached before and formed relationships with students who shared my interests in science and research.

The dorms were spacious and air-conditioned, with one bathroom per hall. The bathrooms were large, and I never had any problems getting a shower or sink. The residency hall was also just a few steps away from the dining hall, so we were able to access both easily. The dining hall offered a large variety of food, and it was all pretty good. They also offered meals that were vegan, gluten-free, etc. I had most of my meals there, but would go out with my friends sometimes to other restaurants.

With more than 100 students in the program, they split us into groups, and we were assigned two counselors per group. My counselors were super helpful and answered all of our questions. They were not too strict about us leaving the dorms outside of class, as long as we let them know where we were going. We were supposed to check in with our counselors at 4 p.m. (which is right after class) and 9 p.m.. By 9, we could not leave the residency hall, and at 11, they conducted bed checks. However, I had swim practice almost every day until 8:45, so it could sometimes be hard for me to get back before 9. I talked to my counselors about it, and they were very understanding and kept that in mind for the entirety of the camp.

In class, we studied various neurological topics, such as the foundation of the brain and mental disorders. We had a three-hour session in the morning, had a lunch break, and went back to class for another three hours. The morning sessions were more

presentation-based, where our instructor talked us through the subject. We also had many class and small-group discussions to help us better understand what we were learning. Although I initially thought the class sessions were boring, I soon became very interested in the topics and enjoyed learning and discussing these themes with my classmates. In the afternoon, we were able to apply what we learned that morning to hands-on activities. We got to try different brain scans on ourselves, dissected sheep brains, and conducted our own research projects. These activities really helped me get a better understanding of what we learned.

Overall, the class was not too challenging for me. I got to learn a lot of new things, and although some ideas may have been confusing at first, I quickly learned with the help of my instructors and classmates. We did not have any homework outside of class, as we were able to get everything finished in class. There really was not that much work, and the course was more activity-based rather than giving out assignments and quizzes. I really enjoyed learning this way, as I felt less pressure and was able to process information more quickly.

Before this course, I had not taken any classes on neurology-related topics, and I was worried that I would fall behind. However, we started from scratch and discussed the most basic parts of the brain and progressively moved on to the more complicated subjects. With the help of the instructors and my classmates, I understood all of these topics, learning more and more every day.

This program really helped me grow into a better person, both academically and socially. I learned so much during the two weeks I spent there and made many new friendships that lasted beyond the course. One important thing I learned was collaborating with others. I have always been someone who has preferred to work alone, but this program has really changed my mindset. We did a lot of class and small-group discussions during the course, and although I originally felt uncomfortable and awkward, I became a lot better as the program went on. It really helped me understand how important teamwork is, and that if you step out of your comfort zone, you can discover so many new things about yourself.

Looking back, I would highly recommend this program to future Garwin students. It is a great opportunity to experience college life, meet students from many different backgrounds, and learn about subjects that may not be offered in high school. Even if you are nervous about being away from home or meeting new people, I encourage you to give it a chance. I felt the same way at the beginning, but by the end of the program, I formed so many lasting friendships, became much more confident, and created memories that I will always remember.

I am extremely grateful to the Garwin Family Foundation for making this experience possible. Without their support, I would not have had the opportunity to attend such an incredible program, meet so many amazing people, and learn from the outstanding instructors at the University of Michigan. The friendships I made, the

knowledge I gained, and the confidence I built during those two weeks will stay with me forever. This experience encouraged me to keep exploring new interests and take advantage of opportunities that help me grow, even if it feels challenging.