

Final Reflection on My 2026 Summer Enrichment Experience at Northwestern University.

by Reka Nabe

Though Northwestern's College Preparation Program was not the first pre-college program I have attended, it was still a drastically different experience from any other two weeks of my life—and, to that note, I would confidently call it the most extraordinary, transformative two weeks of my life. From my time in the classroom to the friends I hung out with after our lectures, everything felt free and special and new; even the (few) bad parts were always reclaimed as “character development” or “for the plot” by the people around me. I truly feel like my brain and heart have grown three sizes since I stepped into my residence hall for the first time, and besides knowing quite a bit about bioethics, I learned a lot more about myself: who I am, who I want to be, what I want to accomplish, and what kind of people I want to bring along for the journey.

From an academic standpoint, I can't say I've ever been more genuinely excited to learn about a topic than taking Bioethics with Professor Sheldon. Somehow, the combination of an interest in the field being discussed and Professor Sheldon's magical wisdom made going to my class one of the best parts of my day. The tricky topics we covered—abortion, vaccination mandates, child organ donation, the principles of clinical ethics, resource allocation, and about a dozen other concepts—were never discussed in a vacuum, as they often, harmfully, are in common arguments. We were always pushed to consider the larger implications of every action taken, the moral generalizations our ideas created, and the aspects that could make every possible solution wrong in addition to those that made them right. When we analyzed passages written by philosophers and ethicists, when real-world cases were placed in our hands for independent analysis, and even when we, as students, began offering our stories related to lecture topics for examination, Professor Sheldon would gather all of the information and consider any angle available for strengths and faults or encourage us to do so ourselves. While we did learn a lot of factual details of bioethics, for me, the biggest takeaways were skill-based; critical thinking, case analysis, and recognition of errors were all presented in ways I can't say I have seen in high school. One of my friends mentioned after the first week of class that “it feels like mental exercise in a good way,” and I completely agree.

I absolutely loved how dissimilar my bioethics course was to a high school class; part of this was the low number of students, yes, but I also think the way Professor Sheldon handled working with teenagers made a huge difference in my enjoyment of the class. He looked at us and talked to us as though we were slightly less experienced equals to him rather than immature kids who needed help becoming adults. When appropriate, he was blunt and frank with us, and other times, he was appreciative and celebratory, but not in a different way than I expect he would have acted with a real college class or even a friend. He earned each student's respect through his actions, making us more dedicated and eager to be taught. Additionally, all of the students—of which there were only five, including myself—had a mutual understanding that we would get out of the course what we put in. So, though we weren't quizzed over the readings assigned each night or penalized for not contributing to discussions, we all did what was expected of us and more so that we could reap all of the benefits possible from the two weeks we had at Northwestern. I could speak for days about every area we delved into because the course was *so* effective in capturing my interest, holding it, and funneling information into my brain in a

way I anticipate retaining long-term. This course singlehandedly made me start tossing around career ideas that take slight turns from my previous options: medical malpractice law? Health policy analysis? I am certainly excited to see where I can take this field in my future and extend my bioethics learning.

Aside from my course, my two weeks at Northwestern were the first time I had to make brand new friends with whom I'd be spending many days on end without the crutch of another GFF student to ease the process. It felt incredibly refreshing, though, to have a new start in a new place. I kept stumbling upon new friendships in my class, with my roommate, and throughout my residence hall; I randomly bumped into a CPP student named Peighton who quickly became a study-buddy, beach companion, and was absorbed into a small group with a mission to make the most of the seemingly unlimited food options at our disposal: dim sum in Chinatown, deep-dish pizza at Lou Malnati's, ice cream at Kilwin's, and a fried shrimp hoagie near Montrose Beach that Peighton and I agreed we would each pick as our last meal (I truly cannot stress enough how good this sandwich was; I have been describing it in detail to every person who will listen since I got back from Northwestern). Somewhere between an evening public screening of *Mulan* and a sunset trip to Lighthouse Beach for photo-taking, our group of three—Peighton, my roommate, Clara, and me—bonded immensely. So far, we've kept up contact in our group chat frequently since we left Northwestern, and I hope we maintain that connection because these friendships are very close to my heart even after being forged in a short two weeks.

The student life aspect of CPP was, for the most part, great: a nice residence hall, freedom to leave campus with only a buddy during the day, and RAs who all seemed happy to be there considering it was their third two-week session. Besides the strictness of our curfew and sign-out process, most of the RAs and tour guides we bumped into said that our experience living in a Northwestern dorm would be fairly similar to the experience a college student could expect: rooming, sharing spaces, cooking together in the floor lounges, and several other elements that kept being described as "exactly how it was when I lived there." We did have floor meetings every Monday and Wednesday at 10:10 that nearly killed Clara and me; on regular nights, we were wiped out from the day and ready to be asleep around 10:00. Without fail, we would be mumbling the same complaints about how the meetings "could have been a Teams message" before dragging ourselves up five flights of stairs to avoid waiting for the elevators. One of those meetings did give us a chance to sign up for a Chinatown trip that we loved, though, so the mild sleep deprivation provided at least some benefit.

It need not be said that Chicago has a lot more to explore than Carbondale; collectively, we never found ourselves bored with nothing to do. If we had finished our homework, we would go search through discounted Northwestern hoodies, play beach volleyball, hop between thrift stores in Wicker Park, or bake cinnamon rolls (only Pillsbury due to limited baking equipment, but still a lot of fun and a good way to win over our floormates). I like the idea of living near a big city like Chicago in the future, as my days felt so much more full and rewarding when I spent them out and about with constant new activities to try out.

Looking back on the time I spent at Northwestern, I can't remember any instance I spent more than twenty minutes *not* loving my experience. Several of my friends on my floor (Clara and myself included) were almost in tears when it was time to go—the idea of returning home from such an amazing environment left us wishing we were living there, taking these classes long-term. Overall, though, I felt so emotionally and academically validated at the end of the two weeks; honestly, I still feel that validation retrospectively. CPP has made me extremely excited for college life, and it taught me what to look for when considering where I'll be applying next

year, now a growing list based on a few priority characteristics. Somehow, every piece of the puzzle fell into place to make Northwestern CPP a tremendous two weeks for me, and I am deeply grateful to the Garwin Family Foundation, all of the friends I made on campus, and of course, Professor Sheldon for playing a role in this experience. I can tell within my thoughts, feelings, and outlook on the world that I have grown significantly as an individual this summer, and I cannot wait to use every ounce of knowledge I have gained to propel my life forward.