

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

by Trennis Hudson, Jr.

My experience in the Michigan Math and Science Scholars program introduced me to new areas and combinations of science, along with a look at the college environment. The program challenged me to learn new concepts relating to biophysics while also showing me the real-world work that I could do with it. Living on the University of Michigan's campus helped me glimpse of life as an undergraduate in college. Throughout my two-week experience, I practiced independence, responsibility, and relationships with other students, traits that continue to stick with me.

At Michigan, I took the course named "Biophysics: From Physics Through Biology to Medicine." I chose the course because any topics under STEM have always been fascinating to me, and I hoped physics would come easier to me in school. I also felt that a biophysics major could lead to several career paths, so it would help me rule it as an option later. Rather than looking purely into biology, we first learned about physical forces, energy, and motion. We were then asked to apply our acquired physics to life. This includes how muscle cells contract and relax, as well as how nutrients enter and leave cells. Through labs, we were able to conduct chemistry experiments that matched real processes in animal/plant life. The course strengthened my interest in fields relating to the medical world because it strengthened my desire to help people through science.

I found that the biophysics course was rigorous enough to expose me to new scientific concepts while not being too advanced to retain knowledge. The learning only worked, however, if I was able to completely concentrate on the professor. In our longer three-hour lectures, we'd often have very lengthy slideshows, which required our absolute attention to understand the next developing topic. It felt that you could be lost for a long time if you stopped paying attention for just a minute or two. The course often felt slow because of the dragged-out lectures, but they almost always connected to the next lab. My course was different from others in the MMSS program in that I had no homework or assignments. The professor, Dr. Gafni, only had work for the campers in labs. From talking to other campers, I saw that most people did not pay attention; there was no work attached to the lectures, and it was hard to jump back into the lesson after zoning out. I think that enforcing notes or assigned work would've greatly improved everybody's attention and increased the knowledge we gained. Taking the course was worth it, but I'm not sure I would've chosen it if I knew the structure beforehand.

UMich's staff could've made or broken the entire camp experience; luckily, they were overwhelmingly kind to all the students. Dr. Gafni was kind enough to reach out to some of his colleagues and look around their labs. My personal favorite lab conducted research on viral vector gene therapy, which uses viruses to spread beneficial human genes across cells. What made the lab visit so great was the lab director's willingness to answer any questions about how she got to her position, why her research mattered to her, and her

openness to us reaching out to her at any time. The staff running the camp wasn't short on their kindness either. Counselors were able to apply the rules while still being lenient when they felt it was needed, one instance being them extending my curfew when food took unusually long to be prepared. All of UMich's staff, from professors to counselors, made camp feel much more comfortable and welcoming, and I'm personally grateful for their compassion.

MMSS was enjoyable in that the counselors also worked on bonding the students together, rather than sending us to classes and then back to the dorms. The camp counselors scheduled evening activities every day, from a table tennis tournament to karaoke. I also appreciated how competitive sports were also organized, like volleyball, capture the flag, and soccer. These activities brought me closer to other campers from other classes in the program. Thanks to these interactions at evening activities, I made some great connections and friends, including people that I'm still in contact with weeks later. Throughout the two weeks I spent in Ann Arbor, I regularly sat down to eat and went on shopping trips multiple times, all with people I met after classes. The instant sense of community throughout the camp made my camp experience more valuable than anything else could have.

As an athlete, I constantly looked for ways to keep myself at least somewhat active during camp. I was grateful for the commutes to the chemistry building for my class, because I averaged over 15,000 steps a day, or six miles. Evening activities also ensured I could stay active to somewhat make up for missed football practices. Unfortunately, I didn't have access to any gym or training facilities within our campus boundaries. Being away from football and organized training affected my performance at home as I returned from camp. I understand that I will not be able to have as much free time as I did at camp in a real college setting, so I am prepared to find ways to still fit in physical activity as someone who doesn't plan on pursuing college sports.

Having the opportunity to live on Michigan's campus was a great experience because it gave me a glimpse of what college life is like. I had to learn how to coordinate and communicate with my roommate over the boundaries of our room, and during the unfortunate times when either of us forgot our room keys. The dining hall also became a place where I could connect with other students. Having several options rather than structured meals all seven days of the week liberated me. Simply walking around the university was one of the most memorable parts of MMSS. My route to class felt natural after just a few days. UM's campus in itself was very welcoming, sitting right inside the city of Ann Arbor. Being able to stay at UMich for just two weeks has me extremely excited for when I do get to attend college. When I start applying, Michigan will definitely be up there, and I hope they see my interest because of this visit.

I would strongly endorse the decision of any future Garwin Family Foundation students to attend the Michigan Math and Science Scholars program. During my two weeks in Ann Arbor, I was able to meet different personalities and perspectives from all over the country and still keep in touch with them, as of now. All my new connections gave me the chance to see the opportunities others are given in their academic careers. Though other

summer programs may be more rigorous, the University of Michigan offered great campus life, from the dorms to the dining hall, to go with it. The MMSS staff members were always more than happy to answer any of my questions about the program and the university itself, including life in other dorms and financial aid. These experiences have allowed me to return home with more confidence regarding college life and a positive regard for Michigan, a university to which I could potentially apply. The MMSS program will go down as one of the most impactful experiences of my 2026 summer and my future educational goals, and I'd be delighted to see other GFF students with any interest in STEM take the opportunity to apply.