

Editors Column

Living and Learning at UC Davis COSMOS



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During the summer, many rising seniors spend their days preparing for college applications, studying for standardized tests, or working part-time jobs. This summer, however, I had the opportunity to experience the college lifestyle firsthand through the California State Summer School for Mathematics and Science, also known as COSMOS. It is a 4-week in-person summer program hosted by the University of California campuses, each offering different topics within STEM for high school students, allowing them to explore while living on campus. I had the privilege of being part of the mathematics cluster at UC Davis.

For me, the day starts at 7:00 a.m. After getting ready, I head to get breakfast before classes start at 9. Unlike a regular high school schedule, my 5 hours of lectures at COSMOS are all mathematics—the morning classes are taught by Dr. Gravner, where we explore set theory, probability theory, combinatorics, and counting. We also go over interesting probability problems such as the Birthday Problem and the Monty Hall Problem, two famous puzzles that are widely recognized for their counterintuitive results.



Every morning starts with a little exercise: my friends and I ride our bikes to the dining hall for breakfast before starting our classes during our COSMOS experience. [Source: Author, Robin Ryul Kang]

After lunch, it's time for Dr. Tavernetti's class, where we learn multivariable calculus, linear algebra, and the most interesting part—the philosophy of math. In fact, on the first day, we spent the entire 2 hours and 30 minutes of class pondering whether circles truly exist. And just like Dr. Gravner's class, we also have a group problem-solving class where students debate different approaches and work together to solve problems. This collabora-

tive atmosphere, in both classes, feels less like a traditional lecture and more like a group of mathematicians working on a new thesis.

Outside the classroom, living on the college campus has been just as valuable as the academics. Sharing my residence with other high school students leads me to meet at least five new people every day. Because COSMOS is a highly selective summer program and we all share the com-

mon interest in STEM topics, it has never been easier to make new friends.

Although the academics can be quite difficult and we're sitting in a classroom for nearly 7 hours a day, COSMOS provides us with a generous amount of free time—that is, about 5 hours not including meal time. It makes up for the demanding materials we have to study here at UC Davis. Living and learning here for approximately a week has already helped me experience what daily college life feels like, and it no longer feels like a distant and mysterious goal.

The greatest lesson I've learned at COSMOS is that learning becomes far less stressful when accompanied by peers who share the same curiosity and passion, along with professors who genuinely enjoy teaching. That supportive environment has made the subject of mathematics feel more exciting than ever before. As I prepare for my senior year and begin working on college applications, thanks to COSMOS, I'll carry not only additional mathematical knowledge but also friendships, discipline, and confidence.

Student Reporter

My First Mission Trip: A Week of Service in Fresno



Grace Song
Grade 8
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High School

This summer, I had the opportunity to go on my first-ever church mission trip. Mission trips are organized by various groups to serve communities while sharing faith through activities such as Vacation Bible School (VBS), a program that combines games, crafts, music, and lessons for children. Alongside nine other team members, the group spent five days in Fresno. Although I expected a week of fun and excitement, I quickly learned how much preparation, teamwork, and flexibility went into making a mission trip possible.

Even before the others and I left for the trip, the work started. A week before our mission, our team met every afternoon for several hours to prepare. We practiced dances, memorized lines for skits, and planned stations, meticulously working out every aspect of the VBS schedule. While the long practices became tiring at times, they also helped us grow as a team before the trip even started.

On Sunday, the team gathered at La Sarang, the church hosting our mission, and drove four hours to Fresno. After arriving, we set-



The first day of Fresno Missions, the team was able to interact with all of the kids before going into our Bible Camp (VBS). [Source: Seong Sil Hwang]

tled into our AirBnb and went to Korean Harmony Church. Here, we reviewed the schedule, discussed expectations, and reminded ourselves of the purpose of the mission. That evening, we split into pairs to go door to door, inviting families to bring their children to VBS, which we called visitations. Although many homes did not answer and a few people turned us away, we were excited each time we met another family interested in attending.

Each morning began with a team devotion before we picked

up the children and brought them to church. We opened the day with energetic worship dances, followed by a skit that introduced the day's Bible lesson through acting. Afterwards, the children rotated through four stations: crafts, snacks, games, and Bible lessons.

I was in charge of the craft station, where the children completed projects connected to the day's lesson. To give an idea of the crafts we could have such young children complete, one day we worked with clay and

another we made images using tissue paper. Managing a room full of energetic kids and keeping everyone focused was definitely challenging, but it was also one of the most rewarding parts of the trip. Watching the children enjoy the activities and seeing their creativity made the hard work worthwhile.

At the end of each day, the church members drove the children home before returning to rehearse our skits for the following day. Since the skits were a major part of the program, everyone had to know their lines, cues, and props. And after dinner, our team held nightly debriefs where we shared what went well, discussed ways to improve, encouraged one another, and ended the day with praise and prayer.

After four days of VBS, the group celebrated with a team trip to Sequoia National Park, where we were able to visit the famous General Sherman tree and talk about our mission trip. Looking back, my first mission trip taught me not only the importance of serving others, but also the value of preparation and teamwork.

Student Reporter

A Slice of France in Seoul



Dayeon Yang
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Growing up, I often heard stories about France and Europe from my aunt, who spent much of her childhood in Paris and Italy. She told me about the streets that she walked through, the food she ate, the French schools she attended, and every single detail of everyday life. Through her stories, France began to feel strangely familiar to me, even though it was still physically thousands of miles away.

My interest became stronger when I started learning French. As I learned new words and expressions, I became more curious about how the language is used in daily life. When my aunt recommended Seorae Village, I thought it would be a good place to explore because of her connection to France and my own interest in the language.

Seorae Village, a neighborhood in Seocho-gu often called Seoul's "Little France," is known for its French community and includes the Lycée Français de Séoul, bakeries, cafés, restaurants,



Signs in both French and Korean lined the streets in Seorae Village, an amazing French neighborhood in Seoul. [Source: Author, Dayeon Yang]

and shops. French and Korean are also frequently used together on storefronts and signs throughout the neighborhood.

During my visit to Seorae, it was raining, so there were not many people walking around. Still, I saw several residents speaking French as they walked through the area with their children. Hearing the language being used naturally in everyday life made the area's French influence feel more real. It also showed me that the neighborhood was not only designed to look French for visitors, but that the culture was connected to the people who actually lived there.

The local businesses also showed this cultural connection. Many storefronts displayed signs that combined French and Korean, which made the neighborhood feel different from many other parts of Seoul. As I walked around, I enjoyed seeing the French words on signs and trying to understand their meanings using what I had learned in French

class.

At one bakery, I saw a wide selection of French-style breads and pastries. I bought a croissant, a pain au chocolat, and a baguette. All three were delicious. My aunt had especially recommended the croissant, so I tried it: It was crisp on the outside, soft on the inside, and had a rich, buttery flavor. However, my personal favorite was the pain au chocolat because the melted chocolate inside tasted especially good.

Although Seorae Village is not a replica of France, it felt like a place where French culture was connected to everyday life in Seoul. Even though I could not explore everything because of the rain, I was glad to see even a small part of the French culture in Seoul. Imagining the streets and bakeries my aunt may have known during childhood made the visit more meaningful. Since Seorae Village is not very far away, I would like to return on a clearer day and explore more of the neighborhood.

Student Reporter

Inside the Young Artists Orchestra at Tanglewood Institute



Halyn Kim
Grade 10
Harvard-Westlake School

For many young musicians, their summers are spent surrounded by fellow artists, world-class performances, and intensive musical training through various programs. This summer, more than 400 students from not only across the country but also around the world gathered at Boston University Tanglewood Institute (BUTI) in Lenox, Massachusetts, to further advance in their musical studies. Through rehearsals, lessons, masterclasses, and performances, students in the Young Artists Orchestra (YAO) experienced the discipline and creativity that have shaped generations of musicians for over 60 years through the BUTI program.

On arrival day, which occurred on July 5, students faced the first of many challenges of carrying heavy instruments, luggage, and other necessities into their new home for the summer. Housing typically consists of 2-4 roommates in a college-style living situation. Despite the heat, the excitement of meeting fellow musicians and beginning a new chapter filled the campus. After moving into the dorms and



A BUTI student poses in front of Groton Hall, one of the central buildings where musicians begin their summer journey at the institute. [Source: Author, Halyn Kim]

settling in, students participated in orientation sessions that introduced them to the expectations, schedule, and community that would define their experience at BUTI.

Overall, there was little time to adjust. After only a day of many orientations for the students to process, rehearsals began immediately.

For YAO students, mornings quickly became dedicated to full orchestra rehearsals, where they worked together to prepare the challenging repertoire under the guidance of professional conductors and artist teachers. With a total of three concert cycles and performances every two weeks, the first performance date was set for July 18. It featured works including SHENG's Tibetan Swing, NEGRON's Campos Flotantes, RAVEL's Daphnis et Chloé Suite No. 2, RACHMANINOV's Symphonic Dances, and SHOSTAKOVICH's Galop from Moscow-Cheryomushki.

Beyond orchestra rehearsals, students' schedules are filled with opportunities to grow as individual musicians. A day typically consists of various ac-

tivities, such as private lessons, chamber music coachings/opportunities, masterclasses, and performances in local churches, all of which allow students to explore different aspects of their artistry while learning from experienced professionals. Furthermore, with access to performances by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Tanglewood Music Center, students are able to fully experience and immerse themselves in a musical environment.

As a student in the Young Artists Orchestra, I quickly realized that life at BUTI moves at a pretty intense pace. Being surrounded by musicians from different states and countries at such a high level was exciting, but at the same time pretty overwhelming. Each rehearsal so far has required focus, collaboration, and a willingness to improve, whether it was refining a difficult passage or learning how to blend with an entirely new section and peers.

However, for the musicians of the Young Artists Orchestra and me, this summer represents an opportunity to grow while connecting with others and experiencing the tradition of Tanglewood.

Student Reporter

Widening My Worldview Through a Trip to Spain



Amber Lee
Grade 10
La Mirada High School

From the journeys I analyzed of travelers all over the world, I have always felt that there is so much to learn from them and their unique experiences. That being said, I myself value traveling. It is especially rewarding for younger generations, as it is an opportunity to gain different viewpoints. Though, as someone who finds the same amount of happiness and comfort being at home snuggled up in my bed, I have not had many chances to go on international trips.

Then, I learned about EF Educational Tours, which is an educational travel organization that my high school partnered with to offer students the opportunity to venture out into various countries as a guided group tour. Fortunately, I was able to register to travel to Spain along with my friend, who was also interested. It was my first ever international trip, in addition to traveling across the globe without my parents.

For the span of eleven days, the tour package included going to the major cities: Malaga, Granada, Sevilla, Cordoba, Madrid, and Barcelona. Overall, our tour guides were amazing, and my



The infamous Plaza Mayor, located in Madrid, Spain, where every corner of the streets are decorated with beautiful buildings. [Source: Author, Amber Lee]

favorite part of the trip was the beautiful architecture that Spain had. My favorite cities were Sevilla and Madrid. Sevilla is a beautiful city in southwest Spain, located next to the River Guadalquivir. The scenery was the most beautiful in Sevilla, in my opinion. Madrid is the famous capital of Spain and has major tourist attractions, like historic squares and landmarks. Every street I turned to

in those six cities felt like it was straight out of a beautifully crafted postcard. The Baroque and Gothic-style cathedrals, homes, and buildings always caught my eye and had my sore legs pushing through.

A few unexpected inconveniences were that, first, Europe was going through an extreme heat wave. Walking an average

of 20,000 steps a day in the high nineties to low hundred-degree weather was not for the weak. Another thing was the language, as I am not fluent in Spanish and initially thought that most of the people would know English. Though I definitely gained more first-hand experience with their culture by bumping into language barriers and seeing how people from the other side of the world communicate.

Ultimately, from having to pack my own bags every day to navigating through major Spanish cities with just my friend during our free time, this trip was both tiring but extremely rewarding. I was able to learn many different cultural aspects, with the one standing out the most being eating dinner really late, at around eight or nine, as the sun sets pretty late in Spain. Compared to the more fast-paced and car-centric parts of California, Spain was a country where I could more freely venture out and enjoy my own time to its fullest. In the midst of the stress that we have in our lives, I can confidently say that if you have a chance for international travel, you will not regret trying it out.

Student Reporter

Awareness or Marketing: A New Kind of Cafe



Catherine Ryu
Grade 11
Seoul International School

After ordering his coffee, a customer accepted the informational leaflet I handed him and headed upstairs. Nearly an hour later, he returned. Without saying much, he handed me the same leaflet I had given him. This time, however, every empty space on it was covered with handwritten notes. Curious, I read it after he left.

At first, I thought it was a thank-you message. But in reality, his message was not about appreciation, nor was it even about the service we provided. Instead, it questioned the very purpose of the cafe I was volunteering at. The note argued that if the cafe wanted to sell coffee, it should simply sell coffee, not use the stories of socially isolated young adults as a marketing strategy.

This cafe was unlike any I had seen before. For three days, it brought together the public and young adults experiencing hikikomori, a form of prolonged social isolation. While customers visited the cafe as they would any other coffee shop, the orders and small conversations were handled by the program participants



Customers interact with a participant through a virtual avatar: marketing or awareness of others? [Source: Author, Catherine Ryu]

through virtual avatars displayed on a large screen. Each participant designed their own avatar to reflect aspects of their personality and experiences, allowing them to interact with customers while staying anonymous. For many, it was also their first ex-

perience working a part-time job, making the event an important step toward building confidence. Staff volunteers, including myself, assisted customers behind the scenes and helped the event run smoothly.

Inside the cafe, customers were able to leave messages of encouragement to the participants by scanning a QR code. Many took the opportunity to express their support and wish the participants well as they continued taking steps toward reconnecting with society.

What struck me most was not the technology, but the conversations. Customers waited patiently to chat with someone they could not physically see, and participants slowly opened

up through their digital identities. Watching from inside, every message and laugh from conversations warmed my heart.

This customer's note, however, challenged that perspective. It suggested that the stories of socially isolated young adults had become part of the cafe's appeal. Without those stories, would people have visited? And if awareness itself attracts customers, where should the line be drawn between advocacy and marketing?

Still, the note did not change what I witnessed during the three days. I still saw customers willing to wait for a conversation, taking selfies together, and a cafe that created social opportunities for people who otherwise might never have had them. At the same time, the note reminded me that initiatives like these can be interpreted in different ways.

That said, the anonymous note remains worth considering. When does sharing a story become advocacy, and when does it become marketing? The answer may depend on where each of us chooses to draw the line.