

SDC Post-Program Essay

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SDC Program – SDXCO Power of the Word – Study of Hip-Hop through Conscious Rap Lyrics

Professor Jeremy McKinnies and Teaching Associate Charles Shoderu

Ever since I was a kid, I have always hated summer. Before I got accepted into Student Diplomacy Corps' Experimental College SDXCO program, I was so scared I would have to fall into my usual summer routine of not having much to do in the summer. Most summers I would pray for school to start again. Luckily, I was blessed with the opportunity to study on the campus MCLA in Massachusetts with 50 other people from all over the USA and world. I had never felt so blessed.

I knew I would have fun, but I never thought I would have the most fun I've ever had in the entirety of my life or grow so much in a month. This summer has given me the insight I have wanted so much. If you couldn't tell I'm a very spiritual person and I had prayed for hope for the future. And that's exactly what I got.

As a kid everyone told me I was "bright", but I always tend to doubt my abilities and chances. Not many people succeed where I'm from. I will be one of the only people in my extended family to go on to college and then hopefully attend graduate school. Because no one else has done it, it tended to make me feel as though it's simply impossible for me. This summer has shown me it's anything but.

I now know that I was absolutely put on this earth to not only succeed in college but to lead. SDC professors and teaching associates and my fellow SDC students really showed me how much I matter to them. How much I influence them. Little did they know how much they mattered and influenced me as well. Although we were all learning together in the five SDC classes being taught, it felt nothing like school. Something I was so grateful for. Definitely not because academic work was easy (it was hard) or the workload was not high (it certainly was) but because the people that we spent our time with were the most welcoming, friendly, and special people I have ever known. That's something very rare in an actual high school.

It was amazing to not only learn from those people but to share a life with them outside of class. The students definitely made my experience 10,000 times greater than I would've ever expected. I made incredible friends and learned incredible things about those people. They helped me see outside myself, something I often appreciate. It just was so great to meet people who have the same opportunity as you, but so many different lives, stories, skills, and talents.

I also learned a lot from my professor and teaching associate. They didn't just teach me, they believed in me. Even when I doubted myself, they never doubted my abilities, my talent, or my intelligence, but pushed me to be better. They made me believe I belonged in college and was meant to do well there. I will forever be grateful for that. Even though I wasn't quite grateful at the time to be pushed out of my comfort zone, I look back on it now and realize why they did it, and how important it was that they did.

Rhode Island is so small. Everyone literally knows everyone, especially in my city. But at SDC, no one knew me. It was refreshing while it was also scary. The first few days on campus I kept

up my protective shell around me. Living in a dorm was new to me and took some time. I learned how to better adjust and learn how to share spaces with people you're not used to, or maybe you don't even like. I am very appreciative that I learned this skill now and not when I am in actual college. But that's what I mean when I say other people taught me things. Talking with some of my fellow students gave me perspective. My Teaching Associate Charles as well. He would always sit down or pull me aside to talk to me with wisdom and experience, because he too was the first in his family to have gone to college. It was heartwarming. He gave me a perspective I will use for the entirety of my life. He was someone that we always depended on. Many of us have big brothers back home and he kind of filled that spot, and did it well.

I took a hip-hop course mostly about conscious lyricism to be exact. I would have never thought I would be any good at rapping or coming up with lyrics, but during that course, it really expanded my skills. It reminded me how much I love being on stage and helping others build confidence to perform. I've always tried to perform on stage since I was little, but I never quite got the hang of it. Now I see lyric writing, telling socially important stories through poetry and music as free therapy. Something that I'm doing all day every day. Thanks to my professor's urging.

This summer has completely changed me for the better. I have matured in so many ways. I've learned a lot being in North Adams, MA, and not just academically. I don't know if there will ever be anything so amazing in my life that can compete with this summer at SDC. This summer made some type of competition for every other good thing in my life. It is hard to describe how very grateful and blessed I feel to have experienced it.