

ACE Internship Report
Duke Talent Identification Program
Austin College Sherman, Texas
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This past summer, I had the great opportunity to have an ACE internship employed by Duke University in their Duke Talent Identification Program. I was assigned to the Austin College campus, located in Sherman Texas. This camp program differs from a typical summer camp mostly because the campers take academic courses for 6 hours a day, 6 days a week. They are characterized as the high achieving students at their schools, looking to continue growing their knowledge and to get more out of their summer by being academically challenged, in a way they may not normally be during the regular school year. Also importantly, they attend the camp to have fun. To add a social aspect to their time at camp, the campers participate in different evening and weekend activities so that they are able to branch out and meet other campers who may not be in their small group or class. My position in this program was a Residential Counselor; I was responsible for being an active leader for a group of 12 children during each of the three week long camp sessions. My role as a residential guidance counselor focuses on the campers' social development, by being a model and mentor as well as overseeing the safety, well-being, and enjoyment of campers. One statement I specifically told my group was that "it is really great to be at camp and away from home, but you're not free. I am here to be your mom, but I'm not here to be your friend and sister. I'm like a cool aunt", and I believe that to be true. It is true that my responsibility was to enforce the rules and regulations, ensuring that the students will be safe, but not so strictly in a way that they feel they are unable to bring to me their questions and concerns about anything that is happening. There definitely is a balance, and though it took me a while to find it, it proved to be incredibly meaningful to the campers as well as to me once we were able to establish that balanced relationship.

As a residential counselor, part of my daily role included organizing daily programs and activities for the campers, as well as my personal group. A few of my favorite evening programs that the campers participated in included using raw ingredients to make cake pop dough and using kitchen equipment to create the pops, making enough for the entire camp to snack on at the conclusion of the night. Not only did the kids enjoy learning how to use various kitchen equipment to create a delicious snack, they were also able to learn to give back to others and about the value of community service by doing a small act of kindness. In my small group, we baked cookies together while watching a funny film. It was a great way to decompress after a day of learning, allowing the campers' brains to rest and their bodies to relax. One activity that particularly stood out to me was the "crossing the line" activity. This activity was designed for campers to visually see differences and similarities between themselves and others. Students are instructed to cross to the other side of the room if the statement applied to them. Questions started out simple such as "cross to the other side of the room if your favorite color is purple" and progressed to deeper and personal questions such as "cross to the other side of the room if your family is considered upper class", "cross the room if you have experienced suicidal thoughts at some point in your life", "cross the line if you feel physically unattractive". The goal of the activity is to break down stereotypes and make it known that everyone is different, but we are all humans that have experiences that shape us to be the person we are today.

This internship proved to be much more challenging than I had ever expected, and quite honestly, I was burned out more frequently than I had been during my first year of college. I had assignments that included waking up at 6 a.m. to take a group of students on a morning run and then I would also sometimes have night roam duty that required me to do hall scans until 2 a.m. Through these difficult challenges, I learned a lot about my limitations and capabilities. I also

gained knowledge on how to be a better communicator, and I learned how to maintain a positive attitude when I felt far from it. One of the biggest struggles I experienced working at this camp was surprisingly not with the children, but with my co-workers. Reflecting back, we were all people who had strong leadership qualities, and that came to be a problem when we needed to plan events. Everyone thought their idea was the best, resulting in little compromising and a lot of hostility. We often left meetings frustrated from butting heads. Through this, I am able to appreciate the different types of people in the world, with various interests and qualities, because it takes people of all talents to make things run smoothly. Compromise is essential to successful planning and that definitely became clear to me throughout my time working at this camp.

My career goal is to become a high school guidance counselor. I am passionate about the importance of education as well as providing service to others. While this camp's age group is slightly younger than the age I intend to work with, I got the opportunity to spend time with the children, building relationships and having fun with them. I want to be a resource to students in their emotional and academic development; being supportive, compassionate and patient are skills that I believe I am gifted with. At the conclusion of this internship, I am confident in saying that I am still passionate about working with adolescents and find great joy in watching their development academically, socially, emotionally, physically and mentally. This is definitely an experience in which I grew in character and personal development, and I would be more than happy to do it again if given another opportunity.