



# Summer Institute for the Gifted

**Program Outcomes Assessment:**  
Long-term Benefits to Alumni

**Summer Institute for the Gifted**

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Long-term Benefits to Alumni

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# Introduction

As we at Summer Institute for the Gifted (SIG) enter our 25<sup>TH</sup> silver anniversary year, it is fitting that we stop to reflect upon all the wonderful students, parents, staff, programs and campuses we have enjoyed since our first residential summer program began in New Jersey in 1984. Since then, we have launched many more programs on many more campuses and have appreciated the journey immensely.

We can see the wonderful things happening at our campuses, enjoy the growth we see in students, and have fun participating in the social and academic activities that keep students so busy during the program. We enjoy a special view of this process that others do not have. When we are asked about the long term benefits of SIG, we are confident that they are beneficial, but we haven't always had the data on hand to be able to share with those who aren't privy to our view. Now that we have had the opportunity to gather information from our alumni, we are delighted because we can share their feelings and beliefs about SIG with a larger audience. What you will read in this booklet is a compilation of that survey data peppered with other research on additional summer programs.

SIG is part of the American Institute For Foreign Study, the leading cultural exchange organization since 1964. SIG has an advisory board composed of highly regarded educators, university personnel and related area professionals. For more information on any aspect of the SIG programs, please check our website at [www.giftedstudy.com](http://www.giftedstudy.com).

We hope you enjoy reading the results of our study as much as we did.

Barbara Swicord  
President and CEO,  
Summer Institute for the Gifted

# Executive Summary

While one might assume that the main benefit of a summer gifted program lies within the academics, this study has found that the social and personal benefits seem to outweigh the academics. Although a student may first apply to this type of program in search of a leg up within academics, the majority of participants come away from the program with an increased self-confidence, new friends and acquaintances of supportive, like-minded peers and an independence level not previously attained.

In a review of this study's results, seeking fun and connections was an overriding theme of why students initially chose the program and later kept in contact with other members. The alumni surveyed in this study chose SIG as their program of choice based on the selection of courses offered, the colleges and universities that housed them, and the reputation of the SIG program in general. While a large number of alumni believed participation in the program helped them gain entrance into a particular university, an even larger number believed that it helped them become adjusted to college life, introducing them to this type of learning environment. As the number one long term benefit gained was "independence" and the biggest impact the program had on their life was providing them with a sense of "self confidence," it can be concluded that the experiences from an academic summer program not only provide this population with academic learning, but also emotional and psychological growth. Since, in some high schools, the more popular students may not be the more academically gifted, it was important for these students to live and study amongst academic peers in order to gain this heightened awareness of self and others and experience pride in their academic gifts and accomplishments.

Confident students are also ones who take risks that pay off in rewards such as receiving special honors, winning awards for academic excellence as a large percentage of SIG alumni have. It is imperative that a group of students who have been deemed "gifted" also be instilled with this sense of confidence in their own unique skills and levels of comprehension. Many alumni state that courses they took at SIG impacted their ultimate selection of careers much later in life. Through SIG's many diverse academic courses and extra-curricular opportunities, these students are given the encouragement to be themselves. This sense of community and confidence in being themselves, in being intelligent, was stated as one of the top long term benefits of the SIG program by the largest percentage of alumni responding to the survey. The friendships that were formed continue for many years after the program is completed - friendships that are described as the deepest many have created in their lives thus far.

# Study Background

In April of 2008, the Summer Institute for the Gifted sent out a survey questionnaire to a large group of SIG alumni. The findings that follow should be considered a case study and, being heuristic in nature, conclusions drawn should only be associated with these particular SIG alumni's experiences. Therefore, to put this research study in context, the following chart describes the SIG programs in particular as they run today:

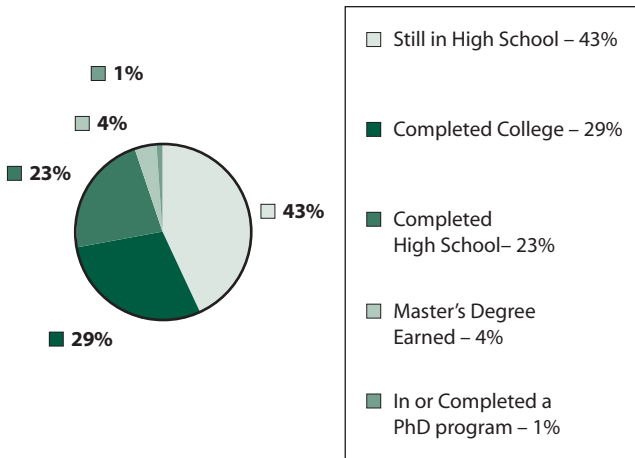
## 2009 SIG Programs

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Numbers of Sessions                  | Residential: 10 programs run on 8 campuses<br>Day: 9 programs run on 8 additional campuses  |
| Students Grades (Ages)               | Residential: Students who have completed grades 4-11 (approximately ages 10-17)<br>Day: Students who have completed grades K-6 (approximately ages 5-11)  |
| Residential and Day Session Duration | 3 weeks   |
| Participant Eligibility              | 95% or higher on a nationally-normed, standardized achievement test or participation in school's program for identified gifted students, other accepted evidence of giftedness  |
| Program Fees                         | Residential: \$4,225-\$4,895 (depending on campus)<br>Day: \$1,925  |
| Session Agenda                       | Residential: weekday - 4-5 courses during 5 period day, followed by recreation period and study time after dinner; weekend trips, movies, dances, parent day, talent shows, etc...<br>Day: 3 courses during day, followed by recreation period and option of extended care in morning and/or evening  |
| Courses                              | Courses developed according to abilities and interest of academically talented and gifted students.<br>Teachers hired local to campus.<br>Student: teacher ratio is 9:1.<br>Average class size is 12.<br>Residential staff includes teachers, director, 3 deans, housemasters, resident assistants, counselors (college students who also act as teachers' assistants), nurse and administrative staff. |

The four page survey sent out to SIG alumni consisted of nineteen questions with many yes and no response categories in addition to those using a four scaled design to determine level of importance. Questions were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. It was mailed to 8,582 past participants over the age of fifteen (those born before September of 1993) with a web address given to fill out the survey on-line. As the main goal of the survey was to be an outcomes assessment of the longer term benefits of the program, the youngest SIG alumni were not polled. A follow-up e-mail was sent a week later to 3,622 of the full 8,582 surveyed with the direct link to the on-line survey. International student e-mails were included in this total number.

579 survey responses were received electronically as well as a few in hard copy format via post, thus giving the project a 7% response rate. *Of the 579 respondents, 89% were alumni themselves, while the remaining 11% were parents of alumni.* (Findings include all responses with no delineation on this point.) As can be seen in Figure 1, *approximately 43% of all respondents were still in high school, 29% completed college, 23% completed high school, 4% had completed a master's degree, and 1% were in a PhD program.*

**Figure 1: Highest Level of Formal Education Attained**



# Program Outcomes Assessment Findings

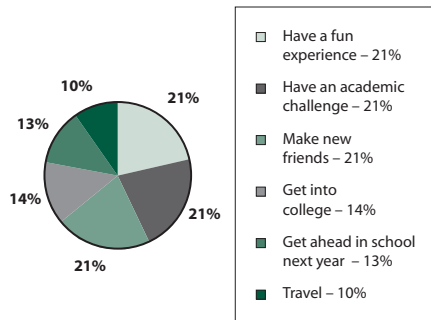
## Why Do Students Select a Summer Academic Program?

There are a number of ways a student can spend the weeks of summer vacation: sport camps, adventure travel, family vacations, academic programs, and watching television, to name just a few. Thousands each year select academic summer programs. However, there is not a lot of information as to why parents choose to send their children to these programs in the first place and why they re-enroll them again in subsequent years (Brown, 2006). It could be that some parents know the outcomes of the few studies that have been conducted on the gifted population that do attend, but this reason is unconfirmed.

Studies have proven that academic summer programs can create academic challenges while also increasing motivations and providing a social support (Olszewski-Kubilius, 1998). Students who participate in such programs pursue more rigorous courses of study down the road, thus accelerating their education faster than those who do not attend. These students also tend to participate more in extra-curricular education opportunities (Barnett & Durden, 1993).

As can be seen in Figure 2, when questioned, “*Why did you choose to attend a summer academic program?*” these alumni ultimately selected the SIG program to “have a fun experience,” for the “academic challenge” and to “make new friends.” Other reasons included, “help get into college,” “get ahead in school next year” and “travel”. However, these latter responses were significantly lower than the previously listed reasons, being considered either “unimportant” or “not considered” for the majority of students filling out the survey.

Figure 2: Reasons to Attend Summer Academic Program



### 1. HAVE A FUN EXPERIENCE

**Research Confirms:** Participating in exciting activities is one of the benefits of academic programs (Mills & Hoffman, 1998).

### 2. HAVE AN ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

**Research Confirms:** (SIG curriculum is based on acceleration and enrichment. Students gain experience with very specific topics that they would not encounter in their regular schooling while working with accelerated content at an accelerated pace.) Enrichment models, if done correctly, can give a more in-depth and hands-on immersion into a subject than regular schooling would (Brown, 2006).

Students attending summer academic programs can learn at a much faster rate and instruction can be done at a much faster pace without sacrificing the level of subject mastery for future course work and students experience a higher degree of satisfaction from the learning (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006).

*“My child learned a lot about things they don’t teach you in schools at that age.”*

—Valerie, mother of Bennett, Fairfield University 2004

### 3. MAKE NEW FRIENDS

**Research Confirms:** Gifted students have some additional psychosocial needs because of their advanced intellect, such as the need to validate their own ability, cope with conflicting expectations, and find positive, supportive relationships (Enerson, 1993).

Many gifted students find their outstanding abilities confusing and not in line with their peers. They, therefore, tend to minimize or hide their talents in order to gain acceptance by their peers and fit in socially (Buescher, 1985; Ford, 1989; Frey, 1991).

Gifted students benefit most when they are grouped with similarly accelerated students in enriched classes (Kulik & Kulik, 1984).

### 4. GET INTO COLLEGE

**Research Confirms:** The average summer academic student will seek out additional academic challenges more so than their non-participating peers. For example, they might take more courses while at college, have a stronger drive to outperform in course work and on standardized tests as seen in average test scores (Brown, 2006).

### 5. GET AHEAD IN SCHOOL NEXT YEAR

**Research Confirms:** Many academic summer programs include students taking courses above their grade level in a shorter amount of time. This acceleration then helps students potentially skip ahead upon returning to their regular classrooms

and tend to be a higher level challenge, more in line with their abilities (Campbell, et al., 2000; Brody & Stanley, 1991).

Comprehension levels of students taking summer courses have been seen to be comparable to peers who took full year high school courses (Stanley & Stanley, 1986).

## 6. TRAVEL

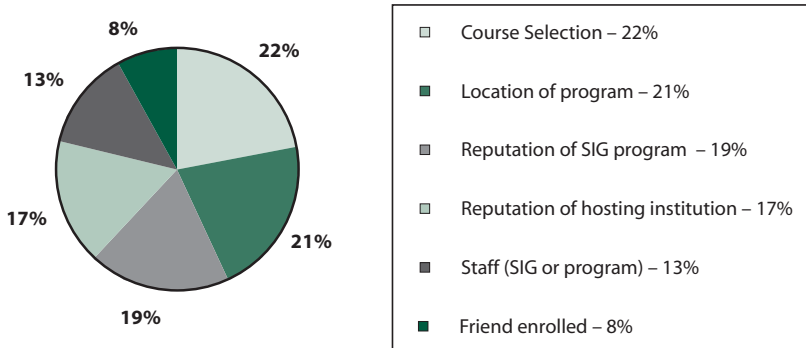
**Research Confirms:** Residential programming on college campuses gives students the same feeling of being independent and helps to relieve fears for students once they enter a four year college/university program. This is particularly helpful to early-entrance students (Center for Talent Development, 2002; Enerson, 1993; Olaszewski-Kubilius, 1989).

After deciding to attend a summer academic program, why then would it be the SIG program in particular that was selected? When asked this question directly, “*Why did you choose to attend the SIG program?*” students’ top four reasons were:

1. Course selection (22%)
2. Location of program (21%)
3. Reputation of SIG program (19%)
4. Reputation of hosting institution (17%)

Figure 3 illustrates these responses.

Figure 3: Reasons to Attend SIG Program



## What are the Academic Benefits to Attending a Summer Academic Program?

Most students who attended a SIG program did not end up attending the same college or university as a four-year matriculated student. *4% of respondents attended the same college or university that they did for their SIG session.* This translates to only 12 total respondents. Of this number, three decided to attend Vassar College, another three Bryn Mawr College and two, Amherst College. In an effort to see if the SIG program helped students get accepted into their final selection of college/university, this question was included:

### **Do you think your participation in a SIG program helped you get accepted into college/university? If yes, how so?**

*35% of respondents believe that their participation in SIG did help them get into college/university.*

Of those who responded positively, 104 students explained in what ways SIG assisted them in getting accepted and eventually enrolled into college/university. The most popular answers were that participating in SIG:

- Showed a commitment and drive to learning
- Helped to set them apart
- Prepared them for standardized tests
- Gave points of discussion during the interview process
- Built their résumé up with the SIG name
- Assisted them in jumping ahead levels in high school after taking academic courses, thereby, assisting in their college acceptance.
- Exposed them to the socialization or college living experience
- Showed a willingness to challenge oneself

*“I believe that SIG helped me get into one of the top 20 liberal arts colleges in the country.”*

—Jamie, Vassar College and Amherst College 2001, 2002 and Vassar College and Bryn Mawr College 2004; Bryn Mawr College 2004

*“Application to college was easy- He visited so many campuses and knew what would be a good fit for him. He understood more than many of his friends the dynamics involved in choosing a school. MIT in the end was his choice and he was right- he loves everything about the school.”*

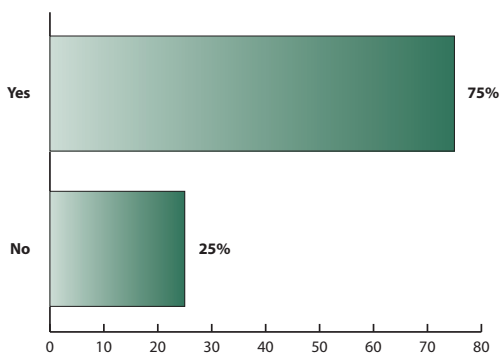
—Rosellen (parent of John), George School 1999; Bryn Mawr College 2001 and Amherst College 2002

Other responses to how SIG helped get them into college included: getting university/college scholarships within the field they chose while attending SIG; helping to get into private school which then helped them get into college; using course credit to finish high school early; scoping out potential college of choice and being accepted to the same program after attending SIG there (with a caveat that they were unsure if this was a direct benefit from attending SIG).

**When asked, “Do you think your participation in a SIG program helped to prepare you for your college experience? How so?”**

*75% believed that their SIG program helped prepare them for their college experience*

**Figure 4: SIG Helped Prepare Me for College/University**



As seen above in Figure 4, 75% of respondents believed that their SIG program helped to prepare them for college. Of those responding positively, there were 209 responses to the “how so” portion of this question.

Below are the most popular responses to the question of “how” SIG helped to prepare them for college:

1. Living in close quarters with dorm mates
2. Being away from home and independent
3. Managing time for social and academic endeavors
4. Walking to classes
5. Making friends
6. Lessening the shock/fear of being a freshman
7. Relying on own judgment by being responsible for successes and failures

*“SIG really pushed me to keep myself motivated. Throughout all of middle school, and now into high school I am constantly challenging myself to do better. Currently, I received acceptance into a semester school in Maine (Maine Coast Semester) that is based off all honors courses. Without the SIG experience at a young age, I do not believe that I would have had the motivation to work at applying for a difficult semester school for ambitious teens. SIG not only benefited me when I was participating in the program, but has continued to help me throughout my academic career.”*

—Ashley, Denison University 2002

*“The program gave me a snapshot of college life for the summer. The experience of life away from home, parents, friends and familiarity was a vital art in preparing me for college. More importantly, the program taught me how to balance a variety of disciplines from art to physics to creative writing while challenging myself academically.”*

—Malaika, Drew University 1999

In how SIG helped to prepare them for college, a few respondents also listed:

- Doing laundry
- Networking and using a new support network
- Discovering that learning could be fun (taking more tailored courses)
- Adjusting quickly to new things
- Meeting people from all over the globe
- Managing money
- Filling free time
- Eating cafeteria food
- Learning the area for future college attendance
- Managing the desire to focus on male/female relationships

**Did you receive any special honors while at university? If yes, which ones?**

*36% received special honors at university*

SIG students are exceptional academics by nature. Of those who received special honors, 310 respondents were beyond high school and of these, 117 named the particular awards they received in college, such as:

- Deans List
- Graduating with honors

- Presidential Scholarship
- National Society for Collegiate Scholars
- University/college scholarships
- Study abroad scholarships
- Levinthal Tutorial
- Fulbright Scholarship
- Community service awards
- USA TODAY All-Star

## Does Attending Summer Academic Programs Impact the Professions of Gifted Students?

### If you are out of school, what is your profession?

As most alumni who responded were on the younger side or still continuing with their higher education, there were only 93 responses to this question. However, the professions most listed by respondents were:

1. Business (such as computer engineers, fundraisers, environment consultants, marketing and sales managers and human resource professionals)
2. Finance
3. Medicine
4. Teaching
5. Arts or Entertainment (such as writers, broadcasters, musicians, television producers, illustrators)
6. Other professions: non-profit workers, lawyers, scientists, real estate agents, government officials, and homemakers

A past study by Barnett and Durden (1993) showed that participants of summer academic programs saw positive long-term effects on their careers. Although the SIG residential programs occur as early as the age of ten, *24% of respondents stated that SIG helped influence their choice of profession or career.* This percentage is staggering given the myriad influences that this population is exposed to before ultimately deciding on a career path. Below are the specific ways (along with some quotes from the 70 participants who responded) in which the academic programs of SIG did help to influence their professions/careers:

### 1. LED TO COLLEGE MAJOR

*"I loved my basic physics class that I took. Building a CO<sub>2</sub> rocket convinced me that I wanted to study to become an engineer."*

—Anthony, Denison University 2001 and 2002

### 2. LED TO FUTURE CAREER PATH

*"I enjoyed the creative writing and film courses, and today I am an aspiring cinematographer."*

—Sean, Amherst College 2002

*"My first experience with veterinary medicine was a class called "Frontiers of Vet Med" at Drew University the summer I was 12, and now I'm in vet school at Cornell."*

—Erica, Drew University 1999 and 2000

### 3. HEIGHTENED INTEREST TO GO INTO TEACHING

*"All my experiences at school, including my time at SIG, inspired me to enter the field of education."*

—Kathleen, Vassar College 1999 and Amherst College 2000

### 4. CONFIRMED WHICH SUBJECT TO NOT CONTINUE

*"I took several courses at SIG which influenced which career I would not want. This was excellent as I did not have to waste time stumbling around in freshman year searching for a profession."*

—Raymond, Bryn Mawr College 2004

### 5. CONTINUED OR REINFORCED INTEREST IN SUBJECT

*"The Globalization and Women Studies courses helped me to realize that human rights was not just a small interest of mine but an actual passion and it has helped me in deciding my career plans."*

—Stephanie, Denison 2002, Vassar College 2007

### 6. GAVE SAMPLING OF COURSES NOT OFFERED IN SCHOOL

*"I took much more advanced computer courses at SIG than my high school offered."*

—Alex, George School 1999-2001

### 7. SHOWED LEARNING, AND EVENTUALLY WORK, COULD BE FUN AND CREATIVE

*"SIG made science fun and accessible to everyone and encouraged me to do something exciting and interesting rather than traditional."*

—Cathy, Bryn Mawr College 1999, 2000

## 8. GAVE CONFIDENCE AND INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

*“Gave me the confidence to know that I could compete in college and the intellectual freedom allowed me to explore my current double major -- computer science and music. It made me realize that it was OK to be interested in science.”*

—Michael, Bryn Mawr College 1999

## 9. BROUGHT TOGETHER COMMUNITY OF THOSE WITH SIMILAR INTELLECT, BUT DIVERSE INTERESTS

*“I loved being surrounded by other intellectual people who actually thought it was cool and fun and interesting to spend afternoons talking about philosophy and math and telling jokes in Latin and just generally challenging ourselves and each other. SIG definitely built up my desire to be a professor/researcher in an academic field.”*

—Andrea, George School 1999

## Are There Any Social Benefits to Attending a Summer Academic Program?

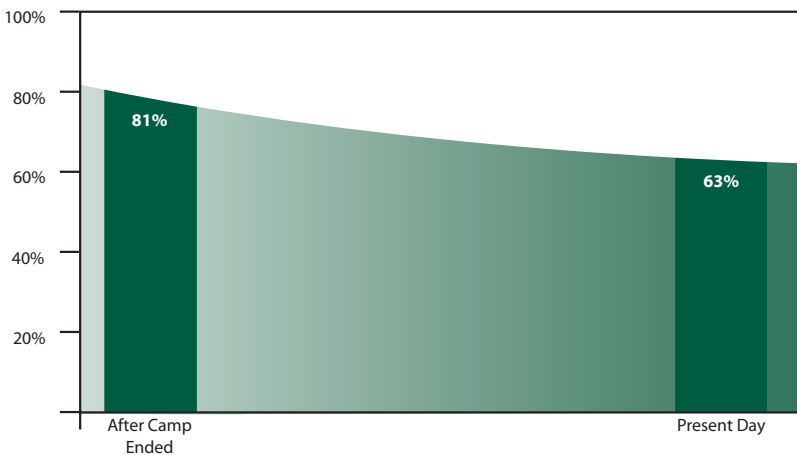
Respondents claim also to have social benefits from an academic camp as well as academic and professional benefits.

**When asked, “Did you maintain contact with people you met at SIG after camp ended?”**

*81% maintained contact with people from SIG after camp ended*

*63% maintain contact with people from SIG even today*

**Figure 5: Maintain Contact with People from SIG**



Of those 179 respondents who went on to comment on this topic, top themes emerged:

1. Social networking sites help to stay connected (Facebook, MySpace)
2. Long lasting and deep friendships were made (best friends, wedding party members among group)
3. Connections were made with people from all over the world (program extended them well beyond their state and country boundaries)
4. Commonalities exist with other alumni that participants don't have with any other friends

*“Although three weeks seemed like a short time, a lot of us really bonded and it’s like we’ve known each other forever. I still talk to a lot of the people I met at SIG every week and a few of us even met up and reunited”.*

—Matthew, UCLA 2007

*“I made the best friends I have ever had at SIG, and I am still in contact with them. I think I was able to do this because, in most situations, I don’t make super-close friends because I’m a little bit different, but at SIG, being different is normal!”*

—Anya, Bryn Mawr College 2005;  
Princeton University 2006; Bryn Mawr College 2007

Contact with other alumni ranged from one to two months after program ended to eight years later, however, this cannot be seen as a program outcome finding as the ages of the respondents and the number of respondents is not a gauge on longevity of friendship.

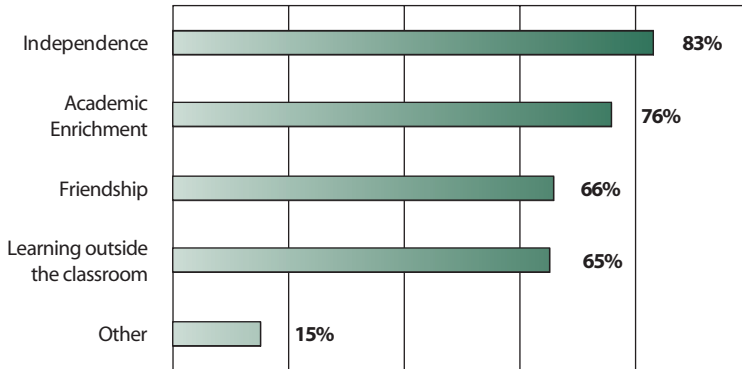
Also, it must be noted that there was a small subset (five) of respondents who did not make friends or feel this same sense of community. It would be interesting to question this group to see why so many felt a confidence in a group that was similar, yet very diverse to themselves, and why some did not.

## What Are the Long Term Benefits and Impacts on the Life of a Gifted Student Who Attends a Summer Academic Program?

**When asked, what were the long term benefits to you of attending a SIG program?**

*Independence topped the list at 83%. Academic enrichment was cited by 76%, then friendships with 66% and finally learning outside the classroom at 65%. See Figure 6.*

Figure 6: Long Term Benefits of Attending SIG Program



### 1. INDEPENDENCE

**Research Confirms:** Students and parents agree that summer academic programs provide them with opportunities for personal growth, such as gaining confidence inside and outside the classroom (Enerson, 1993; Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, et al., 1984) as well as gaining independence (Enerson, 1993; Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee, 2004; Brown, 2006).

Students experience heightened aspirations and expectations and a new sense of self-directedness. There is also a new sense of belonging at school and a greater comfort with being 'who they are' (Frost, 2005).

Participants of summer camps for the gifted have a strong desire for independence (Brown, 2006).

The social self-concepts of gifted students are increased after participating in a summer program (e.g., Rinn, 2006; Brown, 2006).

### 2. ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT

**Research Confirms:** A study of students who had taken a three-week accelerated summer course in physics shows that the students had retained much more information than their counterparts who had taken a regular honors physics class in high school (Hsu, 2003).

Many gifted learners are intrinsically motivated individuals who see the value of mastery for its own sake and tend to achieve more than their less motivated peers (Lens & Rand, 2000).

### 3. FRIENDSHIPS

**Research Confirms:** Gifted learners reported social/emotional benefits of homogeneous grouping such as being around peers who understand them, not being teased for academic drive and achievement and better teacher/student relations. Also, academically-speaking, being educated with intellectual peers, allows for a faster pace, a greater challenge, less repetition and more time to concentrate on their own study without the interruption of tutoring less able peers (Adams-Byers, Whitsell, & Moon, 2004; Brown, 2006).

Gifted students value aspects of summer academic programs, such as forming new and lasting friendships (Enerson, 1993; Mills & Hoffman, 1998).

In part because of the homogenous nature of the population, summer programs provide students with interactions with peers (of similar intellect) that share common interests, priorities and values as well as a bond over academic pursuits. This creates lasting friendships of support and encouragement (Piskurich, 2003; Enerson, 1993; Brown 2006).

Finding common ground with peers of different intellectual ability is difficult. It is likely that because making friends is more difficult for gifted students, these students put more value on friendships created in this supportive atmosphere. Meaningful relationships that are formed become precious (Enerson, 1993; Brown, 2006).

### 4. LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

**Research Confirms:** Residential summer programs have proven to provide a better match for gifted students' ability levels than in-school programs, and create opportunities for peer groups based on similar interests and aptitude (Campbell, Wagner, & Walberg, 2000; Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee, 2004).

The creative thinker often demonstrates the ability to identify and solve problems with a greater degree of fluency, creativity, originality and thoroughness than their less creative peers (Callahan, 1991).

There was an open-ended portion of this question for those who did not see their long term benefit among this given list. Of those 80 "other" long term benefit responses, the following were most noted:

#### 1. A GREATER SENSE OF SELF (CONFIDENCE) AND OF OTHERS

**Research Confirms:** An increased interaction with like-minded peers, and not just parents, may lead to an increase in social self-concept (Rinn, 2006).

Being among peers for gifted learners is beneficial both intellectually and psychosocially if the conditions allow for maximum differentiation based on the students' level of readiness (Mills & Durden, 1992).

True peer interactions can contribute to a better sense of self, increased self and peer acceptance, and an environment that encourages greater risk-taking (Olszewski-Kubilius, 1989).

## 2. LIVING IN THE COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

**Research Confirms:** Many young students do not have the opportunity to socialize and learn with students of their own intellectual caliber in the way that the students at residential summer academic programs do (Brown, 2006).

Living in dorms and having an opportunity to experience college life is seen as a major benefit of summer academic programs and what students like the most (Brown, 2006).

## 3. FUN MEMORIES

**Research Confirms:** Unlike time-constrained programs typically found in schools, well-balanced residential programs will not focus solely on academics, but will allow sufficient time for physical activity, structured and unstructured social activities, play, and rest (National Association for Gifted Children, 2004).

Other, less common responses included:

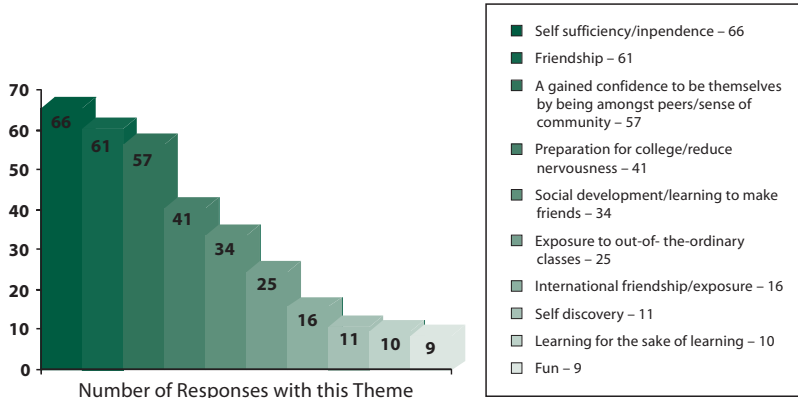
- Being exposed to cultures outside of hometown
- Building a résumé
- Getting a variety of experiences
- Earning college credit
- Learning how to do laundry
- Testing limits
- Acquiring study skills

In response to, “*What was the biggest benefit SIG had on your life?*” 405 students replied in an open-ended format. Similar themes emerged that have been seen throughout this outcomes assessment, most specifically the question regarding long-term benefits. Of those, the following, as seen in Figure 7, were common themes:

1. Self sufficiency/independence
2. Friendship
3. A gained confidence to be themselves by being amongst peers/sense of community
4. Preparation for college/reduce nervousness
5. Social development/learning how to make friends

6. Exposure to out-of-the-ordinary classes
7. International friendship/exposure
8. Self discovery
9. Learning for the sake of learning
10. Fun

**Figure 7: Personal Benefits of Program**



**Note:** This was not a quantitative question; these responses were polled and categorized by this study, therefore, are not direct responses from the participants in their own words or selections. However, for the purposes of this booklet, they give a general idea of response trends.

*“Convinced me to seek out challenging courses, leading me to prep school and then Brown.”*

– Matthew, Rider University 2001, Vassar College 2002-2005

*“Good experiences and memories, in addition to the academics. I was able to improve my tennis and be involved in stage performances, including drama and playing my clarinet.”*

– Philip, Denison University 1999 and 2000

*“I go to a boarding school now, and SIG taught me so much about time management, being independent, and living away from home. When I came here, I had a leg up already.”*

– Amanda, Bryn Mawr College 2003-2005

From a mother whose daughter attended Vassar’s SAT Prep course:

*“In her tenth Grade PSAT exam, Mary Clare got a 99% in Verbal, 99% in Writing, and 98% in Math. She has received many mailings from colleges as a result, even though she is still in tenth grade. Furthermore, she was accepted with a full financial aid grant to an all girl boarding school for eleventh and twelfth grade. I give SIG a lot of the credit for preparing Mary Clare for the PSAT exam. Thank you!!!”*

—Bernadette, mother of Mary Clare, Vassar College 2007

*“Since I’m a foreigner, I could improve my English skills and learn to socialize with different people from different backgrounds.”*

—Sophia, Rider 2001, Drew University 2002, Bryn Mawr College 2004

*“I started going to SIG when I was twelve years old, fresh out of my first year of middle school. Knowing that there was a haven I could go to for three weeks every summer made those awkward years much more bearable.”*

—Jonathan, Bryn Mawr College 2001-2005

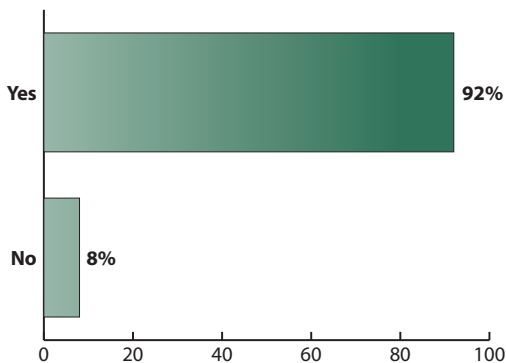
*“Making friends, knowing that I can be independent from my parents, and the stepping stone to a different college summer program that sent me to China last year which convinced me that I could be an exchange student for next year. Without SIG, I would have never begun to think that I could survive going to Japan for a year.”*

—Emily, Bryn Mawr College 2005

## What is the Overall Impression of the SIG Program as Seen by Its Alumni?

Overall, 92% of respondents would recommend the SIG program to a student today. See Figure 8.

Figure 8: Recommend SIG to Future Student



# Conclusion

## Reason for Conducting Outcomes Assessment

Getting into a university has never been more competitive than it is in today's market place. With a slow economy and a greater number of students applying for higher education, it is imperative that students participate in programs that are not only enriching for their own lives, but that also provide a "leg up" with regard to applying for a university.

The majority of studies agree that the benefits of academic summer programs to the gifted student population are tremendous, academically, sociologically and psychologically-speaking. Students from various programs tout the benefits as being multi-faceted, enhancing their academic, but almost more importantly, their emotional and social development during the formative years in which the students attend the program. However, past studies on academic summer programs are not very extensive and many do not look at long term benefits years later. Therefore, in an effort to better understand the benefits of such programs on alumni years after their participation, the Summer Institute for the Gifted (SIG) launched this outcomes assessment which became the basis for this booklet.

## Outcomes Assessment Design Weaknesses

There are some areas of the design of this study that could have been improved. Since this research was a case study using the SIG population, it is important to note that findings also pertain just to this individual population. In addition, those who would respond to this type of study might also be biased in their affinity for the program. The survey cover letter was sent from the director of the program. This fact might have tainted results. As well, using a questionnaire with open-ended results can leave the data open to more interpretation. And finally, older alumni response rates to the survey were not as high as hoped. It would be beneficial to know if the data obtained, "24% of respondents stated that SIG helped influence their choice of profession or career," could be applied to an even greater population. Influencing one's choice of career is a powerful long term benefit that academic camps such as SIG should fully understand.

## Areas for Future Study

Results from this study can be taken a step further in many other areas of study that emerged from this assessment:

- SIG alumni were asked about special awards they earned while at college, but it would be interesting to see the percentage of alumni that went on to attend Ivy League or other high ranking institutions to see if there is a link.

- The majority of students attending SIG do not continue on to attend the same campuses for their college experience, but a few do stand out. Do Vassar College, Bryn Mawr College or Amherst College do anything differently than other SIG campuses to recruit SIG students to attend their universities for the full four year program?
- The data obtained from this study could also be analyzed, taking other criteria into account, such as the students' gender, ethnicity, age or sexual orientation.

## Call to Action

The long term value of summer academic programs is undeniable. However, it is imperative that some policy changes be called for to highlight the needs of this underserved population.

- This study has helped to clarify that which academic summer program staff know through first hand student accounts. However, grounding these stories in qualitative and quantitative data can provide programs with a greater drive to “get the word out” in their recruitment campaigns and help them to target areas of the country and the world that have not had the participation that they should.
- Further funding by the U.S. government on the federal and local level as well as funding by colleges and universities or businesses also would show an understanding of and commitment to expanding these programs and helping them reach populations that cannot afford this experience.
- The benefits of summer academic programming need to be shared with all who interact with the gifted population: educators, parents, and students themselves. Such information is powerful in helping advocates of gifted students understand the benefits of summer programs so that they can assist in guiding students to make decisions that will help them succeed in the short and long term.

Studies have proven that experiential, holistic learning is more effective than regular classroom experience; however, as gifted education is not federally mandated, it is left to the states and districts to determine the best ways to treat this population. Unfortunately, many students are left either without a program or with one that does not fully stimulate them. Under the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988, federal funding for grants is available for gifted programs. However, the money isn't promised within the public school system, thus making summer programs and extracurricular gifted programs increasingly more popular (Gallagher, 2004).

However, the myriad benefits that academic summer programs bring to a gifted population have gone underutilized with only a small percentage of this population claiming them. It is important that these benefits be clearly known and shared with a much larger group of ethnically and socio-economically diverse students. It is the hope that

the findings in this study will help to fully realize this effort.

It is important to continue these discussions and research on the life-changing benefits of academic summer programs such as SIG. In 2004, a report emerged from the John Templeton Foundation entitled, “A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students” (Colangelo, N., Assouline, S.G., and Gross, M.U.M Eds, 2004). For continuing to educate others on gifted study, it is imperative that reports and studies such as these be shared and used to change policy. The gifted population deserves this attention.

Your feedback on this outcomes assessment for a summer gifted program is welcome as is your input for future research to enhance the programs that are offered to gifted students, most specifically by the Summer Institute for the Gifted.

For further information or to obtain additional copies of this booklet, please contact:

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A copy of this study is also available on-line at [www.giftedstudy.com](http://www.giftedstudy.com) and can be forwarded to those who would benefit from this knowledge or be able to further assist these programs. Thank you.

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