



Comments from Parents of SSP Alumni

For over forty years, “the SSP experience” has had profoundly beneficial effects on its students, far beyond mere academics. These benefits are documented and confirmed in three major ways:

- eloquent personal statements from alumni and their parents
- the impressive accomplishments of its alumni
- the willingness of alumni to assume responsibility for both funding and operating the program after 1999 (unprecedented, as far as we know, for a six-week summer program)

This document contains a sample of comments we’ve received from parents, all collected over the past few years. At the end are a few comments from teachers as well.

Class of 2006

“Danielle has gained not only knowledge, maturity, and a taste of the “outside” world beyond the east coast, but friends for a lifetime that are of the same mold as herself. It was a summer she’ll always remember and hold close to her heart forever!!”
–Barbara Piskorz, mother of Danielle Piskorz ‘06

“After SSP Anshul is a different person. There was a complete transformation in him. He now knows how fun and academics can coexist and he has learned the art of balancing both. Anshul has matured and is now much better prepared for college life. SSP’s collaborative environment is now an important benchmark for him in choosing a college. Thanks SSP!”
–Sandeep Bhagi, father of Anshul Bhagi ‘06

“According to Kirit, it was the most grueling, but the coolest learning experience of his life. He felt challenged, and really liked the collaborative nature of the project.”
–Subhash Karkare, father of Kirit Karkare ‘06

“The most important outcome was that Russell gained real self-confidence in his math and science abilities. Although he has always done well in school, he never had the chance to work with others who challenged him in a way that allowed him to test his limits. He did that very successfully at SSP.”
–Michelle Wolf, mother of Russell Wolf ‘06

“We are truly amazed at how David had matured both emotionally and intellectually over the few weeks at SSP. He learned to analyze real experimental data, but most importantly, he had the opportunity to work like a scientist in a nurturing team environment. The SSP experience affirms his plan to major in physics. To put it simply, SSP is well worth the cost – the experience is priceless. We are grateful to SSP for paving the way for our next generation of young scientists.”
–Manyee Gee, father of David Gee ‘06

"If you send your child to SSP, expect that your kid will phone home terrified during the first week, will alternate enthusiastic and scared messages during the next ten days, will not have time to respond to calls during the following three weeks, and will hastily phone you as a very busy adult during the last days at SSP. Have you ever watched a butterfly emerge from a chrysalis?"

"For a single parent, sending his son alone 10,000 miles away for almost two months is a decision painfully made. I can confidently say that it has been one of the few most inspired decisions in my life. He came back exhausted and thinner, but what an assured young man I embraced at the airport!"

–Horia-Nicolai Teodorescu, Romania, father of Mike Horia Teodorescu '06

"We had no doubt from the beginning that Adrian would have a positive experience at SSP. It turned out to be even better than we had expected. Thanks, and good luck with the future development of the program."

–Fulvio Melia, father of Adrian Melia '06

"Our son describes six weeks of nonstop fun and learning, and the best summer experience of his life. He was not the only "math and science guy" at SSP; there were 36 equally motivated students from around the world, eager to explore new, advanced topics beyond the scope of a high school curriculum. Months after the program, this unique group of friends continues to communicate daily, sharing their lives and future plans. Their paths are sure to cross again."

"Thanks for having a great program for these kids. It was all we hoped for and more."

–James and Kathy Bartz, parents of Steven Bartz '06

"We read everything we could online about SSP. It was a stretch for us financially but did seem like a well established, highly credentialed program with a lot to offer. For six weeks, it was a bargain. We invest in our kids."

"The Summer Science Program itself showed the benefits of being fifty years in the making. The advanced math, the hands on science, the quality facility, the perfectly chosen Staff, the attention to friendship, class and team building; these were the obvious result of years of experience at educating young people and developing their character and interest in learning."

"What else did Zach do besides spend six weeks looking at starry skies? He learned about himself. He learned that he can do fun and important things with people who are as smart and even smarter than he is. He learned that lots of people really care and are very good at what they do. He learned that he is ready to go away to collage. He learned that he can always come home to family and that his emotional and spiritual growth will be acknowledged and appreciated."

"Thanks for helping us to raise our son."

–George and Carol Johnson, parents of Zach Johnson '06

"The entire SSP experience was invaluable to Ryan in multiple ways. Afterward the first thing he said was, 'I didn't want to come home!' Ryan also shared that 'SSP was the first time I worked with other students who were as passionate as I am about science; living together and working long hours on science projects was intensely rewarding and gratifying. I already miss my SSP friends!'"

"We wholeheartedly recommend this program to any highly motivated high school student interested in pursuing a career in science."

–Amy & Bill Dahn, parents of Ryan Dahn '06

Class of 2005

"For the first time in her life, Mary was surrounded by her peers. She has quit saying 'I'll never get into MIT...' She will move heaven and earth to get back in that environment – it was home for the first time. She doesn't do homework to get an 'A' anymore. Yesterday, she was deriving the Bernoulli differential equations in her chemistry book just for fun. Thanks, SSP!"

–John Masterman

"The SSP was a great experience for our daughter and we would recommend the program to other parents as a great personal growth opportunity and science experience for youth."

–Jane C. Johnson

"Danice has participated in several summer programs over the years. She commented that SSP seemed to be the most worthwhile program that she had ever participated in. Last week her teacher mentioned that Danice seems to be more outgoing and has opened up more with the other students. She credits SSP with this positive change."

–Linda Chou

"Mary returned a more mature and confident young lady. I definitely plan to send our son in two years. Thanks for keeping programs such as this alive and well."

–John E. Bishop, M.D.

"Our son Robert had the best experience of his life at SSP in Socorro last summer, and that's saying a lot since he has been lucky enough to study in Spain, raft through the Grand Canyon, participate in sports camps, travel in England, etc. etc."

"Why was SSP so great? Simply put, for the first time Robert found himself with a group of peers who were highly intellectual and learning for the sake of pure knowledge, not for grades or accolades. He loved studying the principles of calculus and astrophysics during the day . . . and then putting them to use in a real-life observatory. The instruction was top-notch, led by full professors and supported by a strong cast of graduate students. The 36 students also evidently had plenty of fun, if stories of frisbee, pizza, MP3 downloads, and wholesome shenanigans are to be believed."

"Robert came home literally gushing with excitement about college – and at long last really understanding why we hope he goes to a top-notch university where his classmates will be other motivated, high-caliber students."

–Andrew P. Corty

"My son loved every minute, was sorry when it was over, and more than once said, 'I am so glad that I did SSP this summer.' It helped him prepare for college in a non-competitive but intense way."

"I would recommend it to any student who would like a taste of college without the pressure of grades and credits. Both the students and faculty were supportive,"

interesting and fun. Thanks for giving Spencer such a wonderful opportunity."

–Carol Backus

"My son wanted to attend SSP for three specific reasons; one, to learn about astronomy because his high school does not teach this subject, two, to see whether or not he would like living and learning in an environment with exclusively really bright students, and three, to learn if he could live away from home for a long period of time and still function and be happy in case he decided to apply to colleges far away from home. Evan enjoyed the astronomy and returned home knowing that he can apply to colleges anywhere with any kind of student and be productive and happy. He learned a great deal about himself, including a new perspective on his strengths and weaknesses. SSP was a totally positive experience ending with life-long friendships that span the globe. He is looking forward to the reunion! Thank you everyone who makes this great experience possible. "

–Michele Miyazono

"I cannot find enough words to convey how much the SSP program helped Erin to make final decisions toward a college career. Your program needs to be shouted from the roof tops. I plan to do an article for our local paper next fall about the program and how much it helped our daughter to not only be able to experience the wonders of the astronomy and math but to meet professors, professional people, high quality learning partners, and also to realize the commitment that other people in our community and our world have for its youth.

"Your program helped shape Erin the student. She continued her academic quest for knowledge by taking Vector Calculus & Differential Calculus plus Physics with Calculus this year at the local community college in addition to her academic load at the high school.

"The lessons she learned by having the SSP alumni scholarship folks invest in her and by doing the fundraising that enabled her to go, helped shape her ability to realize that if you want something badly enough, you can find a way to make it happen. Thus, her acceptance at all colleges that she applied for and the awarding of scholarships to enable her to attend Yale as a college of her dreams.

Your program made a tremendous impact on our daughter and we would like to convey our small, but humble word of thanks to you all. Continue..... Continue..... The worth far outweighs the work I know that it takes to make it happen. "

–Linda Miller

"Yes, still Lucas speaks with about his experience at SSP last summer. I think the key elements of his reflections are: to be surrounded by kids his age, each one in his/her own terms extraordinary, and the expectations to work and deliver academic results well beyond any prior expectation in is HS career. We will remain very grateful for the opportunity offered to Lucas. Thank you again."

–Carlos S. Baradello

"We had the advantage of visiting the Socorro campus in the middle of the program so we could observe Greg in action. He appeared well adapted to the schedule and the environment. The students all were actively engaged in their projects, even on Saturday morning! The best part was when we had a tour of the observatory and Greg operated the equipment to show us what he had learned over the past 4 weeks.

"We were truly impressed with the faculty members we met and the alumni who were visiting at the same time. Greg admits that the best part of the program was the opportunity to meet other students with the same interests. He enjoyed the classes and the computer lab, but the field trips to the Trinity site, the VLA and Los Alamos were extremely valuable experiences for him. He stays in e-mail contact with the friends he made at SSP.

*"Overall the program was great and we're glad Greg enjoyed the experience."
–Lynne Batchelder*

*"My son Michael felt SSP was a great experience and he really enjoyed the research opportunities that came with the program! Overall, the program was extremely beneficial. He enjoyed meeting other students from all over the country and the world. He still keeps in touch with many of them which I think is one of the strengths of the program. The kids all click because they have a lot in common. Thank you again for a great summer. "
– Ellen Feldman*

"Our son had a great time at SSP, both for the academic and the social experience. The SSP experience was also well-structured and gave no cause for concern to us about his safety, his insertion into the group, etc. We always knew that he was well-cared for, an important factor for us, as he was far, far from home.

"As an American raised in Europe, it was a particularly important experience for him to test his language skills, to measure up against a select group of American students, to be introduced to American student culture, and to learn about options for university study in the US.

*"Overall, I would wholeheartedly recommend the program to parents with kids who are motivated to challenge themselves with a learning experience and learning environment that lies off the standard path."
– Thomas P. Lockhart*

"First of all, many thanks for Masha's happy and inspired face when we met her at the Boston Airport after SSP.

"Although when we found the program website we immediately got the feeling that this program is an excellent match for Masha, the results still exceeded all our hopes and expectations. Some components of the inspired look were partially predictable from what we have learned about the program: demanding courses in Astronomy, Physics, and Math, bright people, and a challenging environment that Masha loves. Also we understood how important it is to experience routine research work before going into science.

"What seemed impossible considering the workload, late night study, and all-night observations was Masha's confident, relaxed, and healthy appearance. Masha made a lot of friends, with whom she is still in constant contact; and she still has that 'airport' expression on her face when she talks about SSP.

*"We were worried very much sending Masha alone to the opposite coast for a long six weeks, but we are very happy that we have made this decision. Best wishes for the next SSP! "
–Lera Baru and Igor Baryakhtar*

Class of 2004

"The SSP experience for my son was nothing less than wonderful. It was worth every penny! It fulfilled and exceeded my hopes and expectations. Kevin returned felling great about having challenged himself. He has a renewed enthusiasm for learning and a greater appreciation of himself. Anytime he speaks of SSP his pleasure is obvious. One small comment he made that stays with me: "The people there, all of them, got my jokes. They really understood what I was talking about." Kevin has thanked his father and I more than once for sending him to SSP."

–Diane Andrus

"We picked up Mary at the end of the session and I was struck by the happiness in her face and the comradeship of the entire group. The enthusiasm has not diminished! I am certain that this boost is helping inspire Mary this year."

–Louise Bush

"We had been worried regarding to homesickness and an environment keeping Benedikt isolated and not part of the group. Homesickness was never an issue. Benedikt was very well integrated in the SSP community. Self-confidence and taking on responsibilities improved substantially. He gained more confidence to study mathematics and physics. To achieve his objective he increased his effort to achieve outstanding results in his SATs and APs."

–Sieglinde and Martin Riedel

"Noele came home raving about her SSP experience. She has told us that those were the most amazing and intense six weeks of her life. She loved the academic challenge, her teachers, the lectures, and her nightly adventures in guiding and measuring. Equally important, she met like-minded peers who shared many of her passions and introduced her to other interests."

–Lorena Norris

"Few experiences you engage in exceed your expectations. The SSP program did just that. Josh found SSP and pointed out to me that very few if any summer study programs allow a high school student to do research. He went to Socorro with the hope to have an academically challenging summer. The academics were first rate, but he got much more. The teachers were excellent, the outside speakers were wonderful, the field trips were incredible. He had a blast."

"As a parent of an academically advanced student I never worry if he can do the work. I worry if he will fit in socially. This was the unexpected highlight of the experience. He made "fast friends" and many of them. He has maintained contact with his SSP friends. I expect some of these friendships may last for many years to come. This experience accelerated Josh academically as well as socially. What more could you ask for? For students like Josh this is an experience of a lifetime! This is evident as SSP has be the subject of Josh's college essays."

–Robert Dillon

"SSP was undoubtedly a real highlight of our son Jonathan's life. He had an absolutely amazing experience. It wasn't just learning all kinds of wonderful things about astronomy and physics from some of the top people in the business, and the thrill of tracking his pet asteroid. It was meeting 35 other interesting and equally motivated young people from all over the world. His roommate was from Turkey, and his teammates were from all over the place. He made friendships that I know will last him a lifetime."

"When we went around 'college shopping' this summer, he talked excitedly about SSP to every science professor and grad student that he got to talk to. Many had heard of the program and thought highly of it.

"Please feel free to pass this along to any prospective parents or students who are interested in having an unbelievably interesting and stimulating summer, or have them e-mail me directly if they like!"

–Steven Tucker

"I didn't know what to expect when Vickie announced she wanted to go to New Mexico for the SSP program last summer. I was delighted to hear (although sporadically and from an exhausted daughter) the updates while Vickie was in the program. When she returned home, she talked non-stop for hours about all the exciting times she had, the interesting people she had met, and all she had learned. Vickie returned home more self-assured and directed. The curriculum helped her become a recognized contributor in her classes this year. I definitely recommend the program."

–Julia Snow

"Michael worked harder than he ever has in his life, and learned more in 6 weeks than most people his age learn in a year. He also had the time of his life. I think that as much as he enjoyed (and was challenged by) the curriculum, the part of SSP Mike enjoyed the most was the people. The instructors and TAs were outstanding, and he has never been part of such a large group of people who shared his love of math and science. Mike loved being able to stay up half the night discussing everything from physics to Monty Python with a group of friends. Mike came away from SSP with a new group of friends, stronger math and science skills, and best of all, a much clearer picture of what he both wants and needs to do in college (and beyond). I think that the very best education helps you to discover your passion and gives you the skills and knowledge that you need to pursue that passion. SSP did both."

–Cindy Pogwizd

"My daughter has an entire new set of friends that she is now in constant contact with electronically, and the post-SSP experience seems just as intense as their summer together. I think the thing that struck me most as a parent was hearing my daughter reveling in the experience of staying up to all hours for the purpose of actually doing scientific research; it was interesting to hear her talk about starting to realize what it is that scientists do, and why it is that in fact a lot of the scientists she knows or has heard about DO work late into the night for some odd reason or another. I can't imagine a better taste of science for a high-school student than the SSP."

–Andy Hanson

"Jameson had a fantastic experience at SSP – both academically and socially. We would definitely recommend the program highly and both he and we would be glad to respond to any specific questions any prospective students or parents might have."

–Maureen Neff

"This is a terrific program and I can only highly recommend it. Arthur was so enthusiastic; and it helped him mature a lot. I guess the best recommendation is to encourage parents to take contact (by e-mail) with alumni."

–Pierre Ewencyk

"I think the neatest thing about the whole SSP experience was the coming together of high achievers who had common interests in science and math. Teresa has never felt such a common bond with a group of students before her SSP experience. This very thought of never again having the same "meeting of the minds" made her cry buckets of tears when she left CA. Thank you again for letting her experience SSP 2004."

–Grace Van Diest

"I believe SSP was a turning point in Erik's life, and the community that was created there continues to support and nourish him. He will also use this experience to give him confidence in the next big transition, heading out of state to go to college. From a parental view, I have seen his sense of responsibility and ability to take care of himself increase dramatically this summer."

–Nancy Kuefler

Comments From Teachers

"I believe that the enrichment in math and science is important, but the greatest benefit of SSP is the interaction with intellectual peers. This is not always possible in public schools; your program allows growth in this critical area in the development of our gifted students. Please, keep up the good work!"

– Keith Barker, AP Physics, Royal H.S., Simi Valley, CA

"I just had a marvelous conversation with Tommy as he was telling me about his experiences at the SSP. He was so excited and animated, and very proud, and I was totally delighted. It was a life-invigorating experience he'll never forget."

–Jeanne Kewell, Counselor, Belmont High School, Los Angeles

"Simone came back from SSP a "new person". Not a day goes by that Simone doesn't discuss her experience not only from a science perspective, but from a social one as well. She was ecstatic to be able to spend her summer working with other kids who truly love science as much as she does, and her self-confidence went through the roof when she realized she could hang with these kids.

The emphasis on hands on, team-work oriented projects was perfect for her and really helped develop her ability to work with others. She has been instrumental in helping the Math Team crank it up a notch and her contributions to the Multivariable/Differential Equations course here are starting to get the other smart girls to sit up and take notice. In short, you have changed Simone's life in such a dramatic and positive way that I have no idea how to thank you. We here have all known that Simone is gifted but you showed her the future in a way we never could – and I believe that will make all the difference for her. Thank you, thank you, thank you."

–Kurt Schleunes, Head of the Mathematics Dept., Marlborough School, Los Angeles

"As an educator and a stepmother, I have sought out all types of programs for girls in science and I can not find an equivalent program ANYWHERE."

–Natasha Blodget, Sandia Prep School, Albuquerque, NM

Finally, a dramatic personal statement from a former Academic Director:

"I think SSP was the best thing I've done with my life."

– Dr. David Pierce, Academic Director '74 – '85