



Coffee With Sarah, A Summerbridge Alum

Q: How did you initially hear about the Summerbridge Pittsburgh program?

I was introduced to the program as a 6th grade student at Frick International Studies Academy. The Directors of Summerbridge Pittsburgh at that time visited my school and presented at an assembly. I remember walking out of there that afternoon, application in hand, grinning from ear-to-ear at the opportunity I had been given to participate in this program.

Q: How did your experience with Summerbridge affect your life after the program?

Summerbridge made me a passionate lifelong learner. I found that some of the most important lessons I learned weren't in Math or English, but in life! Summerbridge taught me *how* to learn and succeed both in and out of the classroom. It gave me the confidence to pursue education, helping me realize that I was capable of achieving great things.

Q: What was one of your most memorable experiences during your time as a student in the program?

Summerbridge has a long-standing tradition of the Spirit Stick. This coveted stick is given each day to one 7th and one 8th grader who epitomizes the essence of true SB spirit. It's arguable that one of the most significant honors is to receive, as an eighth grader,

the Spirit Stick on the very first day of your 8th grade summer. Us Summerbridgers look at this acknowledgment as a desirable accomplishment, because it means that you had *so much* spirit that the directors and returning staff members remember you! I have to admit, despite the many amazing memories from my days at Summerbridge Pittsburgh, winning the Spirit Stick on the first day of my eighth grade summer was by far one of the best!

Q: What influenced your decision to come back and work for the Summerbridge program?

Summerbridge has always held a special place in my heart. Having the opportunity to return to the program and help give future generations of students the same amazing opportunity that I once had was an offer that I could not refuse. I was humbled by the offer and I wouldn't have passed up this chance for anything in the world.

Q: How has going through the program as a student helped you as a Director in the program now?

It's funny to think about the types of things you remember from your childhood. Some of the memories that impacted me most were ones that may surprise my former Summerbridge directors to hear. Every morning, students on the buses would file off and be greeted with a

firm handshake, smile, and personalized "Good Morning!" from our two directors. It was such an incredible way to start the morning, while also subtly teaching us the importance of an enthusiastic and professional first impression. I remember feeling important and energized by this simple handshake. There are so many "normal" moments like these, that I remember from my time as a student at Summerbridge. As a current Director for the Summerbridge program, I want to remind myself that these seemingly "normal" gestures have the potential to impact my current Summerbridge students.

Q: Why is Summerbridge so special?

The most profound growth and change will come from experiences that take you out of your comfort zone. Part of what makes Summerbridge unlike any other program of its kind is that it creates a heterogeneous community of motivated learners. All of the students are passionate about academically advancing, but are also able to push their peers and teachers to think and learn outside the box. The breadth of unique experiences and perspectives that each person brings to the program provides a dynamic blend that incites the profound level of creative learning that takes place. This culture of diversity encourages students to de-

velop and maintain a tolerant and compassionate perspective for people who may be different from them.

Q: If you could visit any other Summerbridge program site nationally or internationally where would it be and why?

I would love to visit Summerbridge New Orleans! Talk about a city that mirrors the uniqueness of Summerbridge! I've never been to New Orleans, but I've heard amazing things about the city. I'm a huge fan of jazz music and good food, so I'm sure that I'd find the city incredibly entertaining. More importantly, I'd love to have the opportunity to speak with some of the SB New Orleans' students about their experiences since Hurricane Katrina.

Sarah Bachner returned to Summerbridge as the new Middle School Program Director. She's a member of the second graduating class.

