



The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center

Getting community youth to, through, and beyond college



DDC Summer Academy is in Full Swing!

The Curriculum

A five-week, full-time rigorous program, DDC Summer Academy includes core content classes – English, Math, Social Studies, Political Science, and Science – that are aligned with the NYS learning standards; and elective classes that address Community Engagement, Social Justice, Pre-Health Professions, and Self Expression through the Arts. The elective classes introduce students to new disciplines they may want to pursue in college and maybe later in their careers.

The curriculum places special emphasis on two key determinants of college success: Mathematics and English – particularly reading, writing, and research skills. In Mathematics, the critical underlying skill is the ability to think systematically and logically. Research shows that students who successfully complete a course beyond Algebra II more than double their chances to graduate from college. Reading and writing are another challenge as nearly half of all high school graduates do not have sufficient writing proficiency to succeed in college.

The Students

Forty-eight DDC 9th and 10th graders are enrolled in Summer Academy as either residential or commuter students. All students take all their meals in a Columbia University dining hall. Residential students have the opportunity to live in a Columbia University dormitory from Monday through Thursday. In addition to academic enrichment, this program offers students a great opportunity to experience college life in one of the top education institutions in America.

The Instructors

Most of the Summer Academy instructors are Columbia University graduate students. They represent Mailman School of Public Health, School of Architecture, School of the Arts, Oral History Program, and Teachers College. All instructors attended two intensive professional development workshops organized by DDC and facilitated by an instructional specialist with extensive experience in developing tailored teaching strategies that get students engaged and motivated to learn.

The Specific Challenge

Summer Academy is DDC's response to the "Summer Loss of Learning" – the loss of academic skills and knowledge that students experience over the summer. Research shows that students from poorer neighborhoods fall behind academically more often and much further than their more affluent peers. Knowledge loss has a very significant long-term impact on their pursuit of higher education and consequent social mobility.

Summer programs for academic enrichment and/or remediation activities such as tutoring, extracurricular activities and summer camps can be expensive, and therefore out of reach for many students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This resource gap exacerbates the achievement gap between wealthy and poor students. DDC's Summer Academy helps to mitigate this circumstance. The impact is powerful: When DDC students go back-to-school on September 5th, they will be a few steps closer to college with a whole new set of skills!

The "Double Discovery" Experience

DDC's innovative approach to college access and success creates opportunities for "Double Discovery" and the mutual benefit of community youth and Columbia students. When they engage with each other through tutoring and mentoring, DDC students discover college life on an Ivy League campus while Columbia students discover the college aspirations and determination of community youth. Everyone benefits: DDC builds the teaching skills of Columbia students so they can effectively share their content expertise with DDC students who are working to strengthen their academic readiness for college access and success.

DDC Students and Alumni told us they want to strengthen their writing skills – We responded with the Writing Intensive Institute

DDC alumni told us that they struggle with many aspects of college-level writing – outlining, development of a strong thesis, grammar, and editing. As one student shared, she wanted to "learn how to write a structured essay".

This is a common problem. Writing is an essential skill for college readiness and success and yet, according to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only approximately 25% of 12th graders are proficient in writing.

To address the challenge, DDC launched the Writing Intensive Institute pilot program in partnership with Columbia Artist/Teachers, Columbia University's School of the Arts. Led by two Columbia graduate students, DDC alumni came to campus for three days to strengthen their skills across all the various stages of writing (e.g. brainstorming, pre-writing, drafting,

revising & editing, and proofreading). They learned how to launch an introduction, construct a clear thesis statement and effectively connect ideas and arguments by examining the style and structure of writing in texts by Plato, Martin Luther King, and B.K. Fisher.

“The ultimate goal is to put students in conversation with other great thinkers and teach them to find their own voice, because **they** are the next generation of great writers,” said the instructor, Sarahann Swain SOA’19.

The pilot program was so well received that DDC will offer the Writing Intensive Institute every year to alumni.

DDC Student Spotlight: Ernesto Pena, 2019/2020 Senior, and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Luciano

I started at DDC three years ago and the first thing I realized was how much I had to buckle down and focus in school if I ever wanted to make it into college!

Then I discovered that I did not like coding as much as I thought, but I loved science. My favorite DDC class was neuroscience, anything that relates to how the brain works.

All that meant I could not continue being a “B” student. I had to learn as much as I could about science and math and come up with a real plan to get to the best college to continue in the field I love.

Fast-track to this summer: I am now an “A” student! On July 15th, I started an intensive six-week hands-on summer program with Hk Maker Lab and Columbia’s Biomedical Engineering department. I also am working on my applications to both Rochester University and Boston University because they have fabulous engineering programs!

Sure, I worked a lot at this and I was persistent, but I would not have made it without DDC. Its programs, counselors and volunteers gave me the direction, the strategies and the unwavering support, every day, every month, every year.

For the College Prep classes, in addition to a counselor, we had a personal mentor who was a Columbia undergraduate student. My mentor did practice tests with me and shared a lot of helpful tips about the SAT.

It is in DDC Saturday classes that I discovered neuroscience! I learned financial literacy and money management through another DDC class. DDC also introduced me to college life through college trips and on-campus workshops.

DDC gave me all the opportunities to determine what I wanted to do and a step-by-step guide with tailored support and encouragement to get there! Thanks DDC!

Ernesto’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Luciano

DDC, we love you guys!!!

The SAT preparation is awesome. At the beginning, Ernesto felt a bit overwhelmed, but you taught him time management and responsibility. You helped him beef up his reading skills and his knowledge of algebra, physics and chemistry. This is how he went from B average to A.

You also taught him to be more assertive and more aware of what he wants to do in life. DDC provides students with a safe haven to become responsible adults, develop social skills, and get familiar and comfortable with college life.

We are so grateful for Ernesto’s time at DDC!

**Calling all DDC Alumni and Former Volunteers!
We want to hear from you!**

Click on this link to reconnect:

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Partner with us to offer the gift of education! To help fund our programs and expand our outreach, click here: “[Change a Life](#)”

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