

**PERCEPTIONS OF WELCH SUMMER SCHOLAR PROGRAM ALUMNI
AND
CHOICES OF COLLEGE MAJOR**

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Abstract

In 1984 the Welch Foundation began the Welch Summer Scholar Program (WSSP) with eight participants at the University of Texas at Austin. The program was designed to provide high level Texas high school students with the opportunity to experience chemistry research above and beyond those normally available in the typical high school science education program. High school science classes are limited by time. In my opinion, scientific theory was not developed during a 45-minute class period, or in a 90-minute block schedule class period. Scientific theory develops over long period of time. Students who are interested in a science career need to be provided with the opportunity to truly experience scientific research, which is the primary goal of the program.

A secondary goal of the program is to recognize the capacity of students to be motivated by a measure of independence in their studies and, therefore to accept greater responsibility for planning and carrying out their own learning. Currently these goals are accomplished during a five-week summer residential program at five sites: The University of Texas at Austin, The University of Texas at Arlington, The University of Texas at Dallas, The University of Houston, and Texas Tech University. From the inaugural eight students, the program now averaged fifty students every summer and has an alumni base of over seven hundred.

Although the majority of students entering the Welch Summer Scholar Program indicate that they have an interest in science, based on my year of experience with the program, many do now know what science truly entails. Science is not the one-hour laboratory experiments that most high school students perform. Science is often hours, days, and years of study focused on one problem. During the five-week program, students get a taste of this research experience. For some students, this is an eye-opening experience and they realize that scientific study is not in their future. Others jump on the science bandwagon and become professionals within the field.

This qualitative study to be presented examined the experiences of WSSP alumni and how their experience helped to determine their choice of college major.