

It's never too early to start preparing for college.

Even though Zoe Harris is only a junior at West Lowndes High School, she got a jump on her college prep last month when she attended the 42nd session of the Mississippi Governor's School (MSG) at Mississippi University for Women.

"It was a great experience," said Harris, who heard about the opportunity on Facebook. "I recommend it to upcoming juniors and seniors. You will get to do a lot of things and experience a lot of things you haven't seen."

The annual two-week event is a tuition-free, residential honors program that offers unique, creative and academic experiences to students with exceptional abilities and achievements.

Fifty-five students – either rising juniors or seniors -- from across the state of Mississippi participated in interdisciplinary courses and team-building exercises. They also had opportunities to create lifelong friendships and memories.

Harris took courses titled "Creating a Culture of Belonging in the Creative Classroom" with Dr Allene

Nichols, an assistant professor of English at The W; and “Radical Courage: Black Legislators in Mississippi’s Reconstruction Government” with DeeDee Baldwin, an associate professor / History librarian at Mississippi State University.

Baldwin said Harris participated in activities like role-playing a 19th-century social movement leader, debating issues that faced Reconstruction leaders, creating a handout about one of the legislators for her classmates and writing a poem as her final creative project.

“She also participated in field trips to Columbus’ Sandfield Cemetery to visit the gravesites of legislators Robert Gleed and Jesse Freeman Boulden and learned about local Black leaders from Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science History teacher Chuck Yarborough,” Baldwin said. “She also visited the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library at MSU, where she got to tour the Grant and Lincoln museums and work with original documents in the library’s archives.”

Harris said she enjoyed learning about Black legislators and going on the field trips. She said she didn’t know much about the legislators or that they were buried in Columbus.

“It was a great way to learn about your history because not many people know about their history,” Harris said. “To have the opportunity to go and look and see the things that are in my area, it was a great experience.”

Harris said History is a possible area of study in college. She said going to the MSG helped prepare her mentally for that time and that she is going to work hard to do what she needs to do to realize the opportunity.

Harris also said the MSG is a great opportunity for college-minded students because it will help expand their horizons, just like it did for her because she admitted she initially didn't want to be there.

“I met people outside my race and people of different colors,” Harris said. “I didn't know any of the people, but once I started talking to them, I met people who are just like me, and we belong here.

“The theme of the MSG was ‘Creating a Culture of Belonging’, and I believe anybody who was there belonged there because they had a gift, and that is why they got accepted.”

For more information about the MGS, go to
<https://web1.muw.edu/govschool>