

Growth isn't always measured in inches.

For Caledonia High School senior Thomas Howard, his latest "growth" spurt may have helped him find a voice that will help lead him on the next step of his educational journey.

Howard hit that spurt June 4-17 during the 42nd session of the Mississippi Governor's School (MSG) at the Mississippi University for Women. 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.

"I feel I really grew out of my shell, I talked to new people and I met new people from around the state," Howard said. "It is also going to help me with college because only 60 or so people get to go every year."

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.

Howard took courses titled “Video Games – What are they good for?” with Dr. Barry Smith, a professor and chair of the Department of Communication at The W, and “Exploring the World of Tabletop Gaming” with Dr. Morgan Green, an instructor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Mississippi State University.

In the “Exploring” course, Green said students learned about the history and popular game mechanics of board games and played a variety of strategy board games to see those game mechanics in action. She said the class played 30 board games and that each student played at least 12 games.

“The scholars started the course with varying levels of experience with strategy board games, and I thought Thomas was on the more experienced end,” Green said. “He had played a few of the games I brought, and I really enjoyed exposing him to more games and seeing him enjoy them.”

Howard said he already had played games like “Ticket to Ride”, “Pandemic” and “Catan” and that he enjoyed being able to help lesser experienced players with those games. He said his ability to interact with so many people is part of why attending the MGS exceeded his expectations. In

fact, Howard said he met probably half of the students at MGS and exchanged telephone numbers with many of them so they can stay in touch.

“The most important thing I took from the Mississippi Governor’s School was meeting new people because it forces you to socialize,” Howard said. “I did things I had never done, like public speaking and playing the piano in a talent show.”

Howard said he wasn’t required to write a poem and then read it in front of people or participate in the talent show, but he acknowledged feeling comfortable in such a large group. He said the experience will help him as he considers his next step: pursuing a degree in aerospace engineering at schools like Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Princeton, Ohio State, Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech and Stanford.

All those schools are bigger than the MGS, but that shouldn’t faze Howard after he seeing there are plenty of people with similar interests and dreams.

“I would definitely recommend the Mississippi Governor’s School to anyone who can write the essay and get in,” Howard said. “It really did surprise me that I

did as well as I did. I didn't think there were people who watched the same videos as me when they were younger and wanted to do the same things."

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