



advocating for change



Shannon Lewis

College Freshman

Shannon Lewis first went to GEMS Camp in the summer between 9th and 10th grade. She and her parents were always on the lookout for summer academic programs and the GEMS Camp seemed like a good option. Shannon's first summer experience was focused on developing leadership skills in addition to the math, science, creativity, and career related activities. She was preparing to become a mentor to the younger girls the following year. Prior to attending GEMS Camp, Shannon had an interest in going into the healthcare field. She has watched her aunt, a nurse, consistently be a caring and strong positive force in her family. Through GEMS, Shannon has learned about other career opportunities, such as engineering, and met many women who inspire her to follow in their footsteps.

One career speaker who stood out to Shannon was Ms. Alexis Clark, president of the GEMS Camp Board of Directors, and a product manager for HILTI North America, a supplier to the construction and energy industries. Shannon liked learning about Ms. Clark's successful navigation of her career in a male dominated industry. She is inspired by Ms. Clark's advocacy for girls in STEM careers. Another speaker who impressed Shannon is an obstetrician and gynecologist (OB/GYN) in Dubai who was educated in the United States. Because of Shannon's interest in healthcare, the OB/GYN was particularly interesting. All the women Shannon has met through GEMS have made an impression on her though. They all care about the girls and want to do what they can to help them envision a future that knows no bounds.

Shannon has learned many valuable skills at the GEMS Camp. She has always been a "math person," so she enjoyed learning new math strategies that have been helpful in her studies. Her study skills have also improved. Having to balance homework and social time during GEMS Camp has greatly enhanced her time management skills. She is successfully juggling the demands of being a dual enrollment student, taking both high school and college classes. The encouragement and support she received at the GEMS Camp have increased her confidence so that she is more willing to speak up in other settings. She has also applied her leadership and mentoring skills in other organizations to which she belongs. A critical skill for higher education and work settings is working effectively on teams. GEMS Camp has equipped Shannon with greater self-knowledge and a keen awareness of the value that each individual brings to a group effort. She is able to apply her team skills in many different settings, something that will pay dividends in the future for the benefit of her future employers.



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Shannon has already started carrying out the GEMS tradition. She considers herself an advocate for girls in STEM. For a service learning project, Shannon was one of the coordinators for a STEM community fair at a local library. For the past two summers, she has mentored girls at the GEMS Camp who are entering 9th grade. Her advice to them is to start taking school seriously. She checks in with “her girls” during the school year to see how they are doing and she sends them each a gift for their birthday. She is proud of what they are accomplishing.

What makes GEMS special for Shannon are the relationships and the culture of the camp. She believes the girls she met during her first summer at GEMS will be lifelong friends and that GEMS Camp community will be an ever-present part of her life. She appreciates all the women she has met, especially Ms. Saki Milton, the founder of GEMS, and the GEMS staff who are supportive of each girl’s dreams. GEMS Camp is a “safe place where you can be yourself.” The adults have high expectations and encourage the girls to have high expectations of themselves, but there is no judgement. Shannon said that the “genuine love and connection” are what make girls like her want to strive to reach their full potential.

Through the GEMS Camp, I was able to travel to the United Arab Emirates in the summer of 2019 I was a little nervous at first, leaving my parents and going outside the country for the first time. It was a great experience. We were very respectful of the culture, making sure we were being respectful overall. Being able to visit the tallest building in the world, the Burj Kahlifa in Dubai, was fun. Just seeing a whole other culture was amazing.

The food was really good. I got to try things that I have never tried before, like lamb. Sometimes I am skeptical about what I try but I didn’t have any problems with the food. I liked it. I would like to go back to Dubai, maybe in the fall or winter. We went in the summer and it was really hot.



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I've always wanted to work in healthcare. I have an aunt who is an RN. She is so caring and compassionate. We call her the family nurse because she is always willing to help if anyone is feeling down or not feeling well. During our visit to the United Arab Emirates we heard from an OB/GYN there who was educated in the United States. Seeing her express her passion and drive in working with and for women reinforced my desire to pursue healthcare. I have always had the advocating spirit in me. Healthcare seems like a perfect field to advocate for people who are in pain and might not be able to speak up for themselves.

GEMS Camp taught me how to work together with others in groups. GEMS girls come from all different kinds of high schools and backgrounds. I learned to be a little more patient with people because they might not think the same way you think. They might have a different perspective. We all come from different backgrounds but we still need to get a job done. I am able to say "Let's see, I'm good at this, but you're better at this. . ." and we can use our strengths to make the outcome better.

If a younger girl asked me if she should go to GEMS Camp, I would say, "Do it. Really just do it, just go in and give it your whole potential. Get involved, take advantage of this opportunity because this looks really good on resumes. Ask questions. Connect." GEMS Camp is a really good networking opportunity. You will meet people who you may cross paths with again later in life. It's an instant network. What is special is the genuine love and connection that I have received from everyone at GEMS Camp. Everyone is so supportive. Even after the GEMS Camp, they are always checking up on you. GEMS is one of those lifelong organizations. It makes you want to come back and give back to the next generation. I still check in with the girls I mentored. They can let me know if they ever need anything. If they have any questions that they may not feel comfortable asking their peers, they can ask me because I have probably gone through it.