

National Youth Science Forum. It's a mundane and scary name for something that most certainly isn't. Every NYSF alumni will love to talk about the fond memories they had throughout the short and exhausting 13-day camp. However, the program schedule of the camp shows nothing that suggests 'fun'. Institution visits, laboratory visits, lectures... it sounds incredibly boring for everyone except for the most hardcore nerds. And therein lies this camp's greatest success; its ability to bring together the Australia's finest nerds who will indeed enjoy such activities. Sharing the fears of year 12, ambitions of future, and the love of science, we all fit together like nuts and bolts. We found friends across Australia, and created a reliable network of people to ask questions that they, too must be struggling with. We know to not underestimate such opportunity.

But it seems like I have just circumvented the question about the camp's entertainment value. Are the lectures boring? The answer is not at all! Intellectually stimulating, wonderfully prepared, and masterfully delivered, the lectures were akin talking to a friend – albeit a very smart one. Perhaps most importantly, many of the lecturers were 'those who had gone before'. They understood what we were going through right now, and knew the challenges we faced ahead. It was wonderful to gain insight from their lives, almost as if somebody gave us a small flashlight to help navigate the dark cave. Insignificant, perhaps, but nonetheless extremely illuminating.

I admit, I did sleep through some of said lectures, and I know that I am not guilty alone. But that wasn't because they were boring, but we were tired from the ceaseless onslaught of the events. Going from 7:30 in the morning to 10:30 at night, and greeted by the classic Australian summer at every doorstep (including our own dorms), we were thoroughly tired. Whatever 'rest time' we had was spent laughing with friends. Had it not been for the home hospitality day on Sunday, I don't think we would've had all 200 students surviving until day 13. I, trying to keep a diary to record all the fruitful days, was especially tired after getting only 6-odd hours of sleep a day. Still, I don't regret my decision, as I put into practice an advice that one of the Staffies (the nickname for our Student Staff) gave me: always keep a record, it will help you in the most unexpected ways. It turns out that for me, it is already helping me to write this recollection.

Speaking of Staffies, they are perhaps the single greatest element which made this camp so brilliant. All past alumni of the camp, these guys demonstrated that the first law of thermodynamics was incorrect. With their unlimited energy, they kept supplying us with fun games and mini activities that acted as a catalyst for settling in with friends and environment. They provided very *real* feedback that was even more relevant than the ones given by the lecturers. They soon became people to be admired for their sheer positive aura. Many of us whispered that we too wished to be Staffies one day, and I believe these people deserve such respect.

The journey was truly something special, and it is impossible to write it down on paper except for the most talented poets. Considering that all of us were science nerds, I doubt any of us will succeed in that regard. But I must say that I now feel equipped with insight to face the soon coming challenges and a whole network of friends that I will eventually meet far into the future (as if proving this point, my school's new Chemistry teacher happens to be NYSF alumni, with an awesome personality to match). I will no doubt cherish this trip, and I sincerely recommend it to anyone and everyone wishing to study STEM. Thank you so much for helping me participate in this event.