Summer Session – Theme Description

The theme of the 2013 summer session is “Challenging Our Borders, Reshaping Our World.” Whether real or imagined, natural or human-constructed, borders shape the way we think about our identity, actions, and options. But much as borders can be seen as limits or divides, they can also be seen as places of connection and exchange. The most pressing challenges facing humankind are complex and multi-faceted, and solving them will require collaboration across many different kinds of borders. Especially when we look at climate change, energy and water use, and other STEM-related problems in their broader context, there are no right or wrong answers—only more or less sustainable, ethical, or effective solutions, depending on priorities and context. Therefore, it is crucial that the next generation of STEM professionals is not only well-versed in math and science, but also possesses the creative and critical abilities to collaborate and empathize with individuals from diverse disciplines and backgrounds.

Inspired by Scholars’ interests and informed by literature on global learning, this summer’s program will help Scholars begin to develop the ability to frame and solve various interconnected STEM problems; consider context, sustainability, ethics, equity, and the impact of potential solutions; and become globally competent young leaders capable of investigating the world, recognizing perspectives, communicating ideas, and taking action! In addition to collaborating with one another on projects modeled on real-world situations (Project Challenges), students will have the opportunity to contribute to real projects taking place in the real world (Serving through STEM Projects), and then collaborate to develop projects of their own design to address problems facing their community (Leadership Grant Projects).

Why “Challenging Our Borders, Reshaping Our World”?: Throughout history, civilizations have struggled over borders—how to draw them, how to best utilize the resources within one’s own borders, how to obtain resources just beyond. Borders and how they are defined continue to affect us in important ways. Scientific discovery can make us realize how vast the world is both outside and inside our bodies and minds. Economic shifts incite, follow, and even necessitate population shifts, as people move within or across geographic borders to find work, housing, healthcare, education, and other opportunities. Borders can also produce, reproduce, or help one overcome inequalities—and sometimes all at once. For example, the internet, a defining communications technology of our day, can both break down physical barriers to information and education and serve to widen socioeconomic gaps. Our lives are made possible by the continuous passage of goods and services into and across our borders, and the decisions we make each day have the capacity to impact the lives—and water, air, resources, quality of life, culture, and safety—of people down the street and on the other side of the world. Yet often, what we do or how we act is constrained by borders, however defined. One’s individual rights—including to work, learn, or even speak—can depend on everything from where one is born to their gender, age, or the color of their skin. Definitions and perceptions of existing borders help shape what we believe to be possible or impossible, and the lives we envision for ourselves are often shaped by what we assume to be our place. Through questioning how we perceive our own borders, we can expand our thinking, re-define those borders with our ideas and actions, and imagine what might be possible for a new and different future. Join us this summer as we begin to change the very shape of our world.

1 When developing programming and curriculum, we draw upon students’ input and interests (garnered through brainstorming sessions, application essays, and more) as inspiration for relevant and exciting STEM projects.