

Dear PTSA,

Hello! This is Mara Gonzalez Moral and Sakura Yamawaki and we were last year's recipients of the HOBY Scholarship. Firstly, we want to express our gratitude for the amazing opportunity you gave us by sponsoring us at this seminar. The experiences and connections we made through this trip have completely changed our outlook on how we can best serve our community.

In three densely-packed days, we took a deep dive into multiple levels of leadership: individual leadership, team leadership, and community leadership. This was done through activities and games, guest speakers, and both small and large group discussions. One of the most unique parts of this seminar was that we became a part of a diverse community in which we were provided with a safe space to share our thoughts and opinions and to connect with others, both with similar and different outlooks. This was incredibly powerful as it taught us to keep an open mind and always be willing to adapt our worldviews. The friendships that we made over this weekend have grown into lasting parts of our everyday lives, as we stay in touch daily with many of the ambassadors.

This trip also gave us exposure to what college life may look like, as it was hosted on the WSU campus, and we were placed in dorms with completely new people. We found ourselves eating at the cafeteria, sharing our bathrooms, and managing our own schedules, independence that we were able to experience early due to this scholarship. We also got to explore the beauty of the campus and the different buildings that were there, further immersing us in this new environment.

As for how we plan to continue HOBY in our own communities,

Sakura: At Issaquah High School, I want to provide more information regarding HOBY to the sophomores, to help them understand the meaningful experience that it is and to encourage them to talk to their counselors about it. I plan to work with my school's activities director to organize ways of advertising this scholarship, through our school news and morning announcements.

Additionally, attending this seminar gave me many connections to other students in my state, who share many of the same aspirations as me. The lessons on leadership, paired with finding students with similar ideas with me, has inspired me to start my own passion project and to extend it to different schools. HOBY has given me the confidence to get my ideas out there and to take action regarding my plans.

Finally, I plan to apply as a counselor to go back to HOBY this year, and help out with leading the several activities at the seminar. The immense impact this experience has had on me has led me to want to give other students the opportunities and lessons HOBY has provided me, and I think that the best way I can achieve this is through going back as a TA.

Mara:

Although this year I moved across the country to Prosper High School in Texas, this experience has truly changed the way I look at community service and how I get involved. As I entered this new environment, I was very intentional with the groups I got involved in, focusing more on a small number of groups that prioritized the issues I was passionate about (such as the climate crisis and fighting political apathy). I realized at HOBY that choosing one or two issues to focus

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on can make the impact of your work much bigger as you can remain focused on those efforts instead of putting a little effort into various areas.

HOBYS also reminded me of the beauty of exploring different perspectives and meeting people different from myself to hear their takes on various issues and topics. Thanks to HOBYS, I have made efforts to do things and have conversations that were originally out of my comfort zone, and I have already been seeing the wonderful effects of this. Doing this has helped me become a more empathetic and understanding person, a better debater and speaker, and overall someone who people are more comfortable being around and discussing complicated or difficult issues with.

My HOBYS experience completely changed the way I think, lead, and interact with others, so I really want to help expand this opportunity to as many people as possible so more people can be turned into powerful leaders. While I don't think my new school currently sends sophomores to HOBYS, I am hoping that I will be able to change that by pitching this incredible opportunity to our Student Council, Booster Clubs, and Admin. I also plan to return to Washington HOBYS as a counselor next year, and I have already made plans to go to the HOBYS World Leadership Conference with some of my HOBYS friends next July.

As you can see, HOBYS made a huge impact on both of us in countless ways. We want to thank you so much again for making this incredible opportunity accessible to us, and we hope that you will continue extending it to as many people as possible in the future. HOBYS really is shaping the next generation's leaders, and we are so grateful to you for continuing to contribute to this movement.

Thank you so much again,
Sakura and Mara