



The Girl Scout Gold Award is more than a prestigious honor - it opens doors to many scholarship opportunities, job interview conversations, networking, connection and commitment to community, all while discovering new things about yourself. It offers a sense of pride and a sense of place. And as guest blogger Gabriella Wilkerson points out, lessons learned that stick with you well beyond the finished project. She offers inspiration for anyone considering going for Gold and even a little advice for those in process. Gabriella's bio follows this post.

Girl Scouts, the Gold Award, and My STEM Journey

These past two summers, I worked at Camp Lewis Perkins. It was such fun to work with the campers. Returning to that space as an adult had me looking back on my Girl Scout memories: the troop meetings, the camp songs, and the Gold Award, which, for me, summarized it all.

Girl Scouts was a formative part of my growth from elementary school through adulthood. In my Brownie troop, we cooked a dinner for sixteen and learned about math, storytelling, and silhouettes. As Cadettes, we bundled up for our mid-winter cookie booths: raising funds so we could later sleep beneath the triceratops skeleton at the Boston Science Museum.

Amidst the fun and friendship, we were finding confidence in our own leadership: incorporating the values of the Girl Scout Promise into how we approached the world.

In middle school, we helped lead activities for Brownies at service unit campouts and I took my first CPR/First Aid certification course in the dining hall of Camp Laurel Wood.

In high school, on the Girls Leadership Board, we practiced networking, elevator pitches, and public speaking. I learned about how our local council runs and the logistics of a non-profit with the Board of Directors.

Concurrently with all of this, I was going through school. The infamous end of it loomed ahead, accompanied by a question. What do you want to do next? The answer at the time was, 'I have no idea.'

The advice I received was to look at what I loved to do. This left me looking to a field populated by men and genius women who, through unique talent, had broken glass ceilings: physics.

I loved physics. My joy in the subject came from my curiosity and fascination. I wasn't the smartest in the room. I possessed no prodigious skill. Based on observed patterns, simply enjoying a subject did not indicate success in the field. I felt that physics could not be my answer.

At the moment that I needed it, Girl Scouts transformed itself into an outlet of representation. Through GSCWM, I met many women in STEM, including aerospace engineers, an astronaut, and ecologists. I learned that, like myself, they loved their various disciplines. Each woman I spoke with was relatable and real. She had worked diligently to be as smart and as talented as she was. She was also a regular person, like me.

When I began my Gold Award project a year later, its goal had been foreshadowed. I wanted to create a resource to reassure youth interested in science, that it was a space for them, just as Girl Scouts had done for me.

I had been a summer intern in the Astronomy Department of the Springfield Science Museum and worked with the department director, Michael Kerr as my project advisor.

The first plan was to develop a set of six science experiment kits for late Elementary-aged kids in partnership with the Springfield City Library. 'Do Try This At Home' kits would be borrowed like a library book.

During this project, the pandemic broke out. Physically shared kits were no longer an option. The new plan and ultimate result of my Gold Award project was the creation of six virtual science kits with directions written in both English and

Spanish. The kits were posted on the museum's website. The free resource reaffirmed the concept that the point of science is not knowing the answer but reveling in curiosity; aligning the project in its new form with the original purpose.

I learned a lot from working on my Gold Award. If I were to try the same project over again, I would be more direct in my communication. I tended to worry about being bossy or demanding in projects. The Gold Award helped me realize that in collaborative spaces, delegation is positive and productive. I would also reach out to others more, cast a wider net, and collaborate with more groups to reach more individuals. While the Gold Award is an individual project it is not done in isolation and is strengthened by many connections with the community.

As I find my way through my college years, researching non-hermitian waves in a physics lab, helping lead an on-campus women's organization, and facilitating the Wesleyan Society of Physics Students, I take the lessons I learned from my Gold Award experience with me.

So, let us zoom back out. Back to this summer. Back to the loose pine-needle dirt under the rain-dampened picnic tables. As the Junior camp-group races to complete the art-stacle course during their craft block, I see how they are all learning and leading. As they grow they are making the world better and being sisters to one another.

Armed with these same values, the Gold Award wrapped up my Girl Scouting adventures as a girl and punctuated my Girl Scout journey to adulthood. Then, it served as an outlet to help my community. Now, it is a suitcase to carry the moments with me. Whether I'm talking with girls at camp or navigating through college and beyond.

Gabriella Wilkerson was an active Girl Scout from Brownie through Ambassador. During her time as a Girl Scout, she served as a girl member on the GSCWM Board of Directors, was a delegate to the GSUSA 2017 National Council Session, and was on the GSCWM Girls Leadership Board. She earned her Gold Award in 2020, on a project regarding stem accessibility.

She is now a junior at Wesleyan University, double majoring in physics and dance. In addition to classes, she leads the university's chapter of the Society of Physics Students and has started doing research that she hopes to develop into a Thesis by the end of her senior year. These past two summers she returned to Camp Lewis Perkins as a unit counselor and then a program specialist.

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