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Lady Gaga went to geek camp, too

By **Elizabeth Landau**, CNN
August 6, 2010 8:06 a.m. EDT

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Did geek camp teach Lady Gaga to rock?

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Duke TIP enrolled more students in 2010 than ever before, with more than 3,100 kids

Attending one of these programs isn't cheap, however -- TIP charges \$3,600 for 3 weeks

In the Zombies and Vampires class, students wrote research papers about magical creatures

(CNN) -- Back when Lady Gaga was just a girl from New York named Stefani Germanotta, she might have been seen as a geek.

Just as a select group of gifted kids do today, she spent three weeks of summer in an intense learning program that offered classes on everything from math to robots to monsters.

Gaga, Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and Google's Sergey Brin are all alumni of the Center for Talented Youth (CTY) at Johns Hopkins University. CTY and the Duke Talent Identification Program (TIP) are two of the most well-known highly selective programs that have given rise to high-achieving adults.

"Being labeled as 'gifted' as a middle school student is a social kiss of death," said Dr. Alison Stuebe, an alumna of the Duke TIP program, which had its largest season ever in 2010 with more than 3,100 students. "To go to a place where, rather than that being a liability, was actually a reason you got to go at all, was just a transforming experience," she said.



There is a misperception that talented youths get what they need in school. In fact, regular school classes don't always allow

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Dillon Dong takes a break from TIP's astronomy, physics and astrobiology class to show off his Rubik's Cube skills.

these kids to reach their full potential, said Brian Cooper, TIP's director of domestic educational programs. Summer sessions like TIP's are needed more and more because in tough economic times, schools are cutting programs for gifted students, he said.

TIP provides an environment where they can feed their passions for the subjects they love without having to worry about grades

and competition, he said.

But first, kids have to prove themselves by taking the SAT in about seventh grade, and they need to score as well as or better than 50 percent of the college-bound juniors and seniors taking the SAT or ACT (you can retest later). Summer Institute for the Gifted, another program, also accepts letters of recommendation and participation in a gifted program as credentials. These camps have programs at various colleges in the U.S., and some in other countries, too.

Even with proven talent, these programs aren't cheap. TIP charges about \$3,600 for a three-week session; CTY is around the same. Summer Institute for the Gifted (SIG), which draws talented youths from kindergarten to 11th grade, charges \$4,225 to live at the program and \$2,195 for commuters for three weeks. All of these programs do offer financial assistance to some students, however.

Being labeled as 'gifted' as a middle school student is a social kiss of death.

—Dr. Alison Stuebe, TIP alumna

Students and alumni tend to agree that it's all worth it.

"It grows you as an individual," said Drew Curtis, founder of fark.com, who attended TIP programs for four summers beginning at age 13. "The ability to be yourself is probably the most valuable thing."

TIP alumni range from bioengineers and lawyers to writers and founders of medical companies. Stuebe is now an obstetrician-gynecologist at the University of North Carolina Health Care System.

Many still draw on their experience of gifted summer programs. Blake Eskin, web editor at The New Yorker, took computer science classes at CTY in the early 1980s. As an adult, he went into journalism, but today, his job involves integrating journalism with systems of data structure.

"Twenty years later, it's not like what I learned in those classes directly applies, but it just has been so indispensable -- that kind of foundation in computer science theory has been kind of indispensable," he said. "What I learned when I was 12 and 13, I don't know how I would be doing this job without that."



TIP students stay focused in a tropical medicine and ethnobiology class this summer.

Graduates of these programs keep in touch, even decades later. Eskin has two or three friends from his CTY years, and Curtis still has some from TIP. Stuebe married another TIPster 11 years ago, although she and her husband did not actually socialize at the program; a TIP teacher officiated the wedding. They know another couple who met at TIP, dated long-distance afterward, and are also married.

"I was like, 'Yes, yes, I'm not a freak, at least amongst freaks,'" Stuebe said of her

TIP experience. "And it gave me confidence that someday, when we all grew up, it would be OK to like to talk about intellectual things and want to do research in science and all that other kind of stuff."

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Sierra Royalty, 13, can relate. She feels left out at school when she talks about her favorite books because usually, no one has heard of them. But this summer at TIP's University of Georgia campus, she spent an entire evening sitting in the room of a friend talking about her favorite parts of James Patterson's "When the Wind Blows."

"Everyone is more on an equal intellectual level. You can really get into discussions with people and they'll know exactly what you're talking about, and they can bring more stuff into it," said Royalty, of Gastonia, North Carolina, who took a course called "Zombies and Vampires."

The "Zombies and Vampires" haunted house was a real highlight for Royalty. Students researched mythological creatures from different cultures such as boggarts, harpies and Filipino vampires, and included them in the house. They also wrote papers about the magical creature of their choice.

Other students can choose to learn an entire year's worth of high school math in three weeks. But even math at TIP has its fun: In Algebra II, for example, students explored the quadratic equation by throwing a Barbie doll off a bridge with various parachute designs.



Abby Mrvos examines a horse at a Duke TIP veterinary class on the campus of the University of Georgia.

Veterinary medicine is another TIP offering at the University of Georgia that got students excited about nontraditional assignments. The class included examinations of a dog, a cow's stomach and work with other animals such as a horse, a goat and an alpaca.

Taking a class like that jump-starts serious conversations that students would never have at home. Meghan Dorn of Charlotte, North Carolina, is only a junior in high school, but she's had long talks about her future medical career at TIP this summer. Her peers helped her weigh the pros and cons of going into veterinary medicine vs. getting a medical degree, something she never would have done back home.

"If you're around a bunch of people like there are at schools and stuff, then you can kind of get down if they don't really like it. But when you're surrounded by so many people who are always excited and happy and everybody's into everything, it just makes it a million times better," Royalty said.

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loyala7

NO THANKS. It would be nice for my children to be fully challenge and their development to be fully realized. But, I would prefer that they were socially astute instead and live the full life with all the experiences that are involved with growing up.

14 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



wakemom

I was a TIP kid in the mid-80's. BEST weeks of my entire life! I can't wait until each of my three kids are old enough to have that same experience. TIP was my savior, and it taught me so much more than writing and math. In your local junior high, if you qualify for TIP you are probably one of t... [more](#)

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BMacCartney

Gifted? Who cares? I do! Lady Gaga is a breath of fresh air in the music business that has been stale for a long time. Whether she or her "people" are responsible for her look and appeal, she is rockin'!

31 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



shorider

In middle school and high school I NEVER cared a thing about what my peers thought. I excelled throughout. I have never heard of CYT, but I think there was something like that in Dallas where I am from - you start college in your junior year of high school. But my parents thought it was too early... [more](#)

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shorider

I meant to say my GPA is less than 2.0

36 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



jimmy2times

It is the reason we are falling behind other countries. If you are truly gifted in any thing academic you are forced to dumb yourself down to the lowest common denominator in order to be accepted.

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ubo

I went to SIG every year from 8th to senior year HS, and it was probably the best part of high school. Since it was basically a bunch of smart geeks we all could feel a lot more comfortable around each other when we might not feel the same at our high schools. It was great to get through my awkward... [more](#)

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thnkfyrslf

I was told that I was one of these kids at an early age. I would routinely score in the 99th percentile on standardized tests in 5-8th grade. When I got to high school I underachieved because of a desire to be cool. I started smoking pot and experimented with other drugs. Algebra killed me in 9th gr... [more](#)

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Carlee77

And a carbonated han solo aspirin to you too.

1 hour ago | [Like \(9\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



drhineybotto

She just didn't go to geek camp...she IS a geek...hurry up 15 minutes...

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NKTC2121

Lady Gaga is proof that our current society, for all of its supposed virtues, is a horrid example of human existence. Instead of creating timeless works of art, we create things like her/him/it. This article tries to illustrate her intelligence, and I don't doubt that she is very smart, but instead ... [more](#)

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Jewish

It all depends on what you call music.

50 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



shorider

she really has talent as opposed to all the other pop artists out there. Like you, I wish she hadn't "sold herself out." I like her music when I feel like having a good time, but she is capable of doing so much more than some bubble gum, pop stuff that is replete with sexual behavior, etc. She re... [more](#)

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RobitusinZ

I'm sad that you find Lady Gaga's music to be any less than that of history's other performers. Society evolves...Mozart and Puccini wrote for and were influenced by the people in their era. It's a shame that people cannot go beyond their snobbish prejudices to appreciate art, regardless of the fo... [more](#)

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n8r

Lady Gaga has the world's best publicist. She is always in the dad-gum news. Anyway, I'd hit it.

2 hours ago | [Like \(6\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



vharmony

Lady GaGa is an idiot!

2 hours ago | [Like \(12\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



KmVoss

Yep, an idiot with 13 #1's on her debut album.

2 hours ago | [Like \(23\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



hackulator

I went to CTY and it was one of the most fun experiences of my childhood.

2 hours ago | [Like \(8\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



nicojryan84

Argh! I used to be one of these kids! It was a total nerd camp but I always felt cool. My parents couldn't afford it but I was able to go on a scholarship each summer.

2 hours ago | [Like \(8\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



celticfaerie

I was G&T when I was in school, but my parents could never have afforded a program like this. Especially for 4

straight summers. It's a shame these things can't be more affordable (before financial aid).

2 hours ago | [Like \(7\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



FrustratedMI

she's not only talented, gifted but also smart? wow...totally kicking the average american's arse...now I understand the jealousy and hatred, typical knuckledragger fashion!

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moondoggie1

Smart, ok, she knows how to make \$\$\$\$. Talented and gifted? Don't agree with that.

1 hour ago | [Like \(3\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



mjguillo

Everybody makes so much about Lady Gargoyle. She's just a Madonna clone/wannabee.

2 hours ago | [Like \(18\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



mjguillo

Now that you've pointed that out, she does resemble Bowie in a lot of ways. So I guess she's a Bowie/Madonna hybrid wannabe. Point is, I don't see much originality in her, and I don't really see the big deal about her. And if you take away all the glam, she's really not all that pretty either. Maybe... [more](#)

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wtf121

No, no. She's most closely resembles David Bowie.

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