

Ex Libris

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GABELLI PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM, BOSTON COLLEGE

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Fall 2018

Dover Retreat Welcomes Returning and Incoming Scholars



Scholars are all smiles at their first event back together for the new school year

By Jenna Mu '22

On August 25th, the Presidential Scholars travelled to the Connors Family Retreat and Conference Center in Dover, Massachusetts. But this retreat wasn't just any retreat. While it had all of the structural components of one-bonding activities, free time, group reflections—it was the Scholars themselves that brought the weekend to life.

Saturday started off with “a bang” as Scholars enjoyed breakfast together. Bursts of laughter and the scent of coffee filled the air as friends reunited with each other before making their way to the chapel. There, Scholars introduced themselves and gave brief overviews of their summer activities. After introductions, Reena Parikh '06 vividly reflected on her Boston College experience and professional life after university. Ms. Parikh recalled her college trips to Jamaica and South Africa and emphasized the importance of mentors. By now, the aromatic wafts of coffee had been

replaced by sentiments of inspiration.

After lunch, Scholars attended individual class meetings, wherein seniors discussed postgraduate plans, juniors discussed internships, sophomores discussed their Social Justice Project, and freshmen discussed the layout of their first year in GPSP. During a break, Scholars engaged in a vast array of activities: some played volleyball, others sunbathed, and yet others frantically tried to find the room keys they had already misplaced. Soon after, Scholars met in small groups where upperclassmen offered advice on all things college from club recommendations to restaurant recommendations, to prepare the freshmen for the upcoming school year. But perhaps nothing was as reassuring as their endearing words: “You're here for a reason. You belong with us.”

The lively day continued with a town hall meeting, class photos, Mass, dinner, and an assembly regarding the Sophomore-Freshman Peer Mentor Program. Soon

after, Scholars gathered in the Hospitality Suite to play board games, swing dance, sing around the piano, and challenge one another to intense air hockey and foosball games. Although the noise eventually settled down, many Scholars stayed up into the wee hours of the morning, energized by fresh coffee and fruitful conversation.

On Sunday, Scholars received an overview of the coming year before the upperclassmen pitched their favorite clubs to the freshmen. Later, sophomores previewed their Social Justice Project—the Geography of Opportunity—and collected feedback from the audience. After closing remarks, Scholars conversed with alumni at the closing barbecue, where long-lasting friendships were rekindled and new connections were forged as the eventful retreat drew to a close. Before leaving, Scholars were sure to share more laughs, hug goodbye, and, of course, grab yet another cup of coffee.

Class of 2019 travels to Jordan

By Josh Elbaz '19

At the end of the summer, the GPSP Class of 2019 embarked on the Program's second trip to study Islam. In August, the Scholars travelled to Amman, Jordan for ten days with a schedule constructed to offer a glimpse into Islamic and Middle Eastern society. Each engagement presented a new lens into Jordan, a country rich with historical artifacts and culture, but also enveloped in a complex political and social environment. On the first day, the Scholars journeyed to Hussein Mosque, a first for many, and learned the fundamentals of Islamic prayer from their tour guide, Rami. Afterwards, they were invited to tea below the prayer area surrounded by crafts and products made in part by refugees who supported themselves by selling them. A tour of the Roman Amphitheater--a relic of the second century CE when Amman was known as "Philadelphia"--came next. In the following days, the Scholars met with advocacy groups and organizations providing relief services, including Tamkeen, a Jordanian NGO combating human trafficking and protecting the rights of vulnerable members of society, particularly migrant workers and refugees. In their meeting, the Scholars heard from Dina "Ferrari" about the pressures facing vulnerable individuals in Jordan as well as some of the legal resources Tamkeen provides for their clients. The Scholars also went to Al Hannouneh, an NGO founded in 1993 that is regarded as one of the preeminent traditional folklore societies in the Arab world. Through performances and arts and crafts, Al Hannouneh is preserving Palestinian cultural heritage that is endangered by long-term, widespread displacement. The students met with the American Center for Oriental Research to learn about the organization's expansive archaeological work and the work of current workers examining the intersection of historical tradition and current tensions in socio-political life in Jordan. The Scholars also passed through the Jabal el-Husseini camp and witnessed first-hand glimpses of life in a Palestinian refugee camp. Jabal el-Husseini was one of four camps established in 1948, and is now an integrated neighborhood within Amman indistinguishable from others; it was difficult to discern that it is actually a refugee camp. In their tour of Jabal el-Husseini, the seniors saw a rich



Scholars ride camels through the desert of Jordan

entrepreneurial spirit behind the vibrant markets and a sense of self-determination in members of the community who, despite tremendous odds, are forming an independent life through property ownership, education, and economic engagement. The students also learned about the efforts led by the Caritas Center for Syrian Families, a catholic relief organization situated in Al Mafraq north of Amman, that work with Syrians from the neighboring Zaatari Refugee Camp. Later in the trip, Scholars talked directly with refugees from Somalia, Sudan, and Iraq at the Jesuit Relief Services headquarters, and learned about familial support provided to Jordanian orphans through SOS village.

In addition to all the meaningful learning experiences, the Scholars found time to explore the other things Jordan has to offer including delicious cuisine, amazing ruins, and stunning nature. Every lunch explored a new flavor and scent. Hummus, salads and bread were followed by wonderfully aromatic hot dishes and a uniquely sweet dessert. The Scholars also took several day trips throughout to enjoy Jordan's natural and historical treasures. On a trip to Madaba, the students saw the first map of the Holy Land — a mosaic laid across the floor of a centuries-old Greek Orthodox church — and stood atop of Mount Nebo, the biblical site where Moses was to see the promised land but never enter it. There, students took in the same panoramic view spanning a boundless desert that featured the Dead Sea and, in the distance, the city of Jericho. The Scholars visited another city of ruins in Jerash, which had the preserved Roman hippodrome, theater, forum, and city gates. On another sunny, cloudless, and

extremely hot day, the Scholars floated in the Dead Sea and slapped the mineral rich mud around their bodies for some prime exfoliation. But the most memorable experience was the overnight trip to Petra and Wadi Rum. Walking a mile through a winding gorge and ruins of ancient Nabataean civilization, the Scholars made their way to the city of Petra — one of the wonders of the world — and witnessed the beautifully ornate Treasury building carved into the rocky cliff face. Sights of tombs and a theater were bound to sounds of donkey carriages and camels sharing the same path. After Petra, the students were driven to Wadi Rum, a protected desert wilderness, where ten camels and a group of native Bedouins were waiting to guide them on a camel trip into the sunset. As the sun was setting, the camel trip ended at a rocky ridge that offered a view of the sand dunes and surrounding rock formations. After the sunset the students settled in their tents and prepared for dinner, while the Bedouins prepared a traditional meal by cooking it underground, below the sand on a bed of charcoal. After the feast, the camp hosts prepared a campfire and tea surrounded by benches and beds. With the evening well underway, the stars poked out of every inch of the sky. Shooting stars occasionally streaked across, and the mist of the Milky Way galaxy layered over a bright, dense collection of stars. The next morning, the students got a final look at Wadi Rum with a Jeep tour that led them along famous landmarks, including the tribute to Lawrence of Arabia, who led his resistance in the same area. Ultimately, the trip to Jordan was an immensely exciting addition to the Program and an influential experience for the seniors and co-directors.

Class of 2019 travels to Jordan



Ever to Excel: Class of 2019 Summer Internship Experiences



Katie Gold '19 at ThredUP headquarters

By Robert Cerise '22

This past summer was an incredibly eventful and productive time for the Class of 2019, as they explored a number of different career paths, ranging from government work to medical research to fashion, here is just a brief look at what some of them were up to:

Avita Anand, an International Studies major with a focus in Global Business, had the rare opportunity to intern with the Democratic Caucus in the Longworth Office of the House of Representatives. The primary functions of the office involve organizing Democratic House members around specific policy plans and staging caucus-wide events, including weekly meetings that seek to address party agenda and bills currently on the floor for debate. Specifically, Avita worked under Joe Crowley, who was recently defeated in a primary race against Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She vividly remembers walking into work the day after the unexpected loss and realizing that all of her superiors were officially out of a job. As shocking and disheartening as the moment was, Avita believes that it gave her the chance to witness how Capitol Hill truly functions under unexpected circumstances.

Overall, Avita thought that the internship was exciting and eye-opening. When she was not drafting memos or debriefing politicians and staff members, she took full advantage of the ability to explore the offices, meeting important figures and listening to House members interact with one another, often in an honest, friendly, and personal manner. She even received training as a Capitol guide and led a number of tour groups through the Hill. As she looks to attend law school, she is grateful for the experience and insight that she received from her time with the caucus.

Joshua Elbaz, a Biology major, spent the summer a long way from home, conducting research at the National Center for Disease

Control and Public Health in Tbilisi, Georgia. There, he worked to characterize a specific strain of bacteria common in the region by sequencing the genome and testing its resistance to certain drugs.

At the same time, Josh worked with the NCDC to develop his Fulbright Project, which looks to measure the prevalence of Hepatitis C for internally displaced peoples who live in collective centers throughout Georgia. That effort involves gathering a great deal of data and generating statistics on transmission and barriers to healthcare, among other things. Josh is thrilled about the project and hopes that it will serve as a means of testing the effectiveness of GHOST Technology, a surveillance tool developed by the United States to track the history of certain diseases.

Shaan Bijwadia, a Computer Science and Economics double major, found himself working at MathWorks in Natick, Massachusetts, as part of a development group for new and potential software engineers. The company, which develops MATLAB programming

language, had Shaan and his team tackle projects from different sections of the company, assigning individual roles and responsibilities to each intern. Shaan worked with complex code to design software elements with specific functions necessary for completing subsequent tasks.

According to Shaan, the experience was interesting and enjoyable; it was a nice dive into what he described as a large, complex, robust code base. Shaan had held a couple of similar internships in the past, but never before had he dealt with something as large as MATLAB. He looks forward to continuing his work in the field, ideally with a giant tech company like Google or Adobe.

Sarya Baladi, an Islamic Civilization and Societies major, also remained in Massachusetts this summer, serving at the International Institute of New England. This nonprofit provides a range of services to refugees and asylees, including English language courses and employment training. Sarya alternated between helping two case managers at the office and spending time in the field, personally caring for two clients and advocating on their behalf at the Department of Transitional Assistance in Boston.

Over the course of the internship, Sarya learned a tremendous amount about the resettlement process and became even more passionate about working on behalf of refugees and asylees. She is heavily considering law school, after which she would ideally work with immigration policy.

The seniors could not adequately express how valuable their internship experiences were to identifying professions that align with their respective interests. Every new project offered a deeper look into the pros and cons of a given career. The Class of 2019 met each challenge with enthusiasm and walked away with a greater idea of what the future has in store.



Josh Elbaz '19, center, in Tbilisi, Georgia

A Summer Abroad

By Kelli Rodrigues '22

As members of the Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program, Scholars spend the summer after their sophomore year abroad. They choose where they would like to go and what they would like to do, an experience that allows for complete immersion into a language and culture.

Megan Reynolds '20 spent her summer in Paris, France working for a startup called Krank Club that offered an app service to help connect friends and friends of friends to play "pick-up" games. This app began in Paris with soccer, but has expanded its geographic scope and the sports it offers. With seven years of French already under her belt, Reynolds wanted to not only develop her language skills, but to also get professional experience. As the only native English speaker in her office, Reynolds was thrown into the language and learned to adapt quickly.

Reynolds explains that one of the most interesting parts of her experience was seeing her skills develop outside of the classroom. For instance, she noticed that her French would sound more natural and polished in certain situations. Without teachers to correct her pronunciation, she independently worked on improving her abilities and learned what circumstances factored into her success with the language, such as her level of fatigue.

A typical weekday for Reynolds entailed working from 9:00 am - 6:30 pm. In the evenings, she would run errands, go grocery shopping, and eat with her roommates and friends from the language program. On the weekends, she would devote time to visiting popular tourist sights to ensure that she was not missing some of the more iconic parts of the city, and also found time to visit London and Brussels.

The best experience, though, was being in France during the World Cup. On the day of the final game, Reynolds went to the "Fan Zone" on the Champs de Mars in front of the



Cole Tamburri, Megan Reynolds, Kate Peaquin, & Evey Satterfield at the Tour de France

Eiffel Tower. There were giant screens broadcasting the match, and over 100,000 people were packed into the square to watch. Every time France scored, the crowd erupted and when France eventually won the game/World Cup, the whole city celebrated for the entire evening.

Sergio Farina '20 worked as a project coordinator for Pangea, a start up consulting group in Madrid, Spain. As a Latino, he had been surrounded by Spanish language his whole life and he knew that he wanted to live and work in a Spanish speaking country. The most important thing for Farina was to develop his speaking skills and improve his fluency. He pursued this goal through immersion at work, and studying new vocabulary at night to incorporate into conversations the following day.

One of the most challenging parts of his experience was being alone in a foreign country, without anyone from home to talk to or explore with. However, he found a group of students from Boston College who were also studying in Madrid to spend time with. A friend from home and a cousin also visited for a few weeks, which helped him feel less lonely and was something he was grateful for.

The most exciting part of Farina's experience was running with the bulls. During a weeklong event called the San Fermin Festival in Pamplona, the town releases twelve bulls into the city streets every morning to run from outside the city walls into the arena. Runners risk their lives for a chance to run ahead of them, and then the bulls are used in bullfights later that day. As Farina explains, "I have never experienced anything so exhilarating in my life and, to do it with some of my best friends, was a memory of a lifetime."

In his free time, Farina was able to explore Madrid. He visited museums, concerts, shopping centers, restaurants, and cafes throughout the city. One of the most helpful resources, recommended by a friend, was a novel called 500 Secrets of Madrid. The book exposed him to several fascinating places where locals, not tourists, spend their time. On the weekends, he traveled to other European cities including London, Valencia, Barcelona, Pamplona, Mallorca, Copenhagen (where he ate an entire quail), Lisbon, and Stockholm.

Leena Rijhwani '20 spent her summer abroad in Quito, Ecuador. She worked for a nonprofit called Child Family Health International that connects students, especially those on a pre-med or pre-health track, to clinical settings in various countries to witness disparity first-hand and become a part of their community. She chose to go to a Spanish-speaking country although she is almost fluent in Hindi, as she felt that it was more important to develop her skills in a language that would be more applicable to her future career as a doctor. In the mornings, Rijhwani would do clinical shadowing at various placements. The placements ranged from clinics where they practiced very traditional medicine to the best private hospital in the city. These placements exposed her to a wide variety of experiences and enabled her to learn a lot about the health-care system in Ecuador. In the afternoons, she took Spanish lessons at a local school.



Leena Rijhwani '20 in the mountains of Ecuador

Summer Abroad cont. from page 5

In her free time, Rijhwani enjoyed the outdoors. Despite not having any experience doing anything like it in the US, she kayaked in a crater lake, rode a zipline across mountains, and went on a lot of hikes, including a five hour solo hike. She even swung off of a cliff in Banos, Ecuador, an experience dubbed the “Swing at the End of the World.” These experiences have inspired her to be more active in nature back at home.

Throughout her summer abroad, she was able to meet a lot of interesting doctors, especially at a clinic for teen moms. The doctors who worked there were not getting paid as much as they could have if they had been working at a private hospital, but they loved helping the young mothers as much as they could. At this placement, as well as many of her others, she realized that her passion lies in gynecology. She witnessed many births and even held and dressed a two-day old baby.

Her most rewarding experience by far though was the tutoring she did for her host brother. In Ecuador, each year, the students must take a final exam in order to pass on to the next grade. If they fail, they get three weeks



Trevor Jones '20 at the Great Wall of China

to study and then take it again. Her host brother had failed the math section the first time so for three weeks, Rijhwani drilled him in math. When he successfully passed the exam, they

went out for pizza to celebrate. This moment was incredibly gratifying and a testament to how much her language skills improved from the cultural immersion.

Alumni Spotlight: Reena Parikh '06



Reena Parikh '06 at the annual Dover Retreat.

By Josh Fording '22

This year's Dover retreat featured Reena Parikh '06 as the alumnae speaker. An English major during her time as a Presidential Scholar at Boston College, Parikh received a JD from the American University Washington College of Law. After law school, she clerked for the Honorable Margaret B. Seymour in the District of South Carolina, and then served as Associate Counsel for the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). In July 2018, Parikh began working as a Clinical Teaching Fellow at Yale Law School's Worker

and Immigrant Rights Advocacy Clinic.

In her talk, Parikh detailed her experiences at Boston College and in the Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program and the effects they had on her. She noted that her family often joked that she was “majoring in extracurriculars” because of her impressive involvement on campus. In fact, her early participation in the then Global Justice Project helped her begin to understand, in the microcosm of BC, what social activism was. She was particularly interested in exploring different strategies to push for social change on campus regarding issues like racial justice, women's rights and LGBT rights. Parikh did this by working both within the system as a leader in UGBC and ALC and outside the system, often participating in on-campus protests. Another important facet of her undergraduate experience, Parikh said, was her extensive international travel. She traveled to Jamaica through the Arrupe International Immersion Program, completed her junior-year internship in India, and completed a study abroad program in South Africa. She said that these experiences were critical in developing her passion for anti-poverty work and international development, which many years later would grow into a career as an immigration lawyer.

One piece of advice Parikh gave the Scholars was to seek out mentors. As an undergraduate, she had planned on pursuing a career in non-profit work, but one of her

faculty mentors suggested that she consider going to law school, emphasizing the valuable role of lawyers in social justice movements. Parikh also expressed that mentors can come in many different forms. During the GPSP retreat her freshman year, Parikh bonded with then senior Marisol Orihuela '03. Years later, when Parikh applied for her current position at Yale, she noticed that Orihuela was one of the faculty members in the clinic she was applying to. Today, Parikh works alongside Orihuela, grateful to have her as a supervisor and mentor. With this story, Parikh emphasized the depth and breadth of the GPSP network showing that it is not unsurprising to find GPSP alumni in many corners of the world doing incredible work and pursuing their passions.

Parikh also discussed her experiences working as Associate Counsel for the USCIS, where she advised the government on immigration-related matters, and advised immigration officers who process immigration benefit applications. She recalled how a major challenge was learning to work with colleagues who had different opinions on legal and immigration topics. She realized that her only chance to effectively convey her viewpoint was to maintain credibility with officers, which came from hearing and addressing their concerns and explaining her views in a non-patronizing way.

Although she enjoyed her job and felt that she was doing meaningful work at the USCIS, Parikh said that the results of the 2016

Class of 2021 Finds Service, Learning, and Camaraderie During their Summer Experience

To fulfill the Jesuit ideal of being men and women in service to others, during the summer following their freshman year the Scholars explore the problems of hunger, homelessness, and educational inequity in the Boston area through participation in a program modeled after PULSE, Boston College's nationally acclaimed course of study and service. Through their work, Presidential Scholars are challenged to see themselves in relation to acute national problems, to think creatively about the roots of these problems, the nature and efficacy of society's response, and the response that these problems elicit in their own personal and professional lives. In parallel with their service, Scholars read and reflect on a variety of texts—from philosophy, social science, public policy, economics and theology—pertinent to issues of poverty and social justice. Weekly discussion sessions challenge Scholars to integrate these readings with their field experiences and to reflect on the implications for their personal values and professional goals.

By Jack McErlean '21

Every spring on the Heights, final exams mark the finish line of the semester for most students as they leave campus for the summer months to work or relax. However, for the freshmen class of Presidential Scholars, our time on campus did not conclude with exams. Rather, we finished the semester, took a couple days for ourselves, and promptly moved our belongings into the beloved building of Shaw House on Upper Campus. There, we began the Summer PULSE Program, an intensive 6-week course from the University's acclaimed social justice department.

The PULSE program seeks to educate students about social justice issues by putting students in direct contact with the issues that they seek to change, so that they "learn by doing." We had the chance to experience this type of hands-on learning by completing volunteer-internships at various social justice oriented organizations in the greater Boston area.

In particular, the Presidential Scholars' Summer PULSE Program is structured so that each Scholar has two placements: one on Mondays and Wednesdays, and the second on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We would spend the full day at our respective volunteer-internships during the week, and then on Friday mornings, we would meet with Professor Meghan Sweeney and Ms. Shanteri Baliga to discuss the week's experiences, the assigned readings, and listen to a guest faculty lecturer.

New this year was Prof. Sweeney's grant which funded guest speakers from among Boston College professors to visit each Friday lecture. Guests included Theology Professor Kristin Heyer on the topic of "Immigration and Ethics," and School of Social Work Professor Tiziana Dearing for the topic "Social Entrepre-

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election, and the subsequent immigration policy changes that ensued, were a wake-up call and led her to reevaluate what role she wanted to play in this moment in history, and what she wanted to do with her career overall. She had always wanted a career in clinical teaching, so she pursued that goal until she secured her



Members of the class of 2021 at Haley House, with Mary Lou Bozza '03 and Paul Davey '15

neurship and Corporate Social Responsibility." This feature of the program proved incredibly enriching, as we would have the chance to discuss our experiences from service placements with an academic who held relevant expertise.

Among the several internship placement sites were Haley House, a community-building organization well-known for its soup kitchen and bakery; the Suffolk House of Corrections, where Scholars tutored inmates for the Massachusetts HIsE exam; the Educational Development Group, where Scholars helped teach English language courses; and many more.

The Summer PULSE program brought our class closer not only to pertinent social justice issues, but also to one another. Six weeks in an old house with a single kitchen meant that we had ample time to socialize. Early morning commutes on the MBTA, late-night dinners, and weekend activities were the backdrop for the PULSE work. Our time

together was not limited to just Shaw House; in fact, several excursions over the PULSE summer found us in such places as music festivals and concerts, various museums, and even New York City. We truly had the opportunity to get to know each other better, just as we got to know our university's city.

The individual experiences of all the Scholars at our respective placements were unique, but as we reflected on them together in Shaw House, at official meetings, and casually after hours, we began to notice how several themes were linked throughout our placements and the city of Boston. These discussions led our class to decide that we would like to address how several factors, in the past and present, result in inequitable urban institutions of education, housing, and transportation. As the fall semester begins, we look forward to putting our Sophomore Social Justice Program into action, addressing the issues countered during Summer PULSE.

job at Yale. On her first day at Yale, the clinic she was working in, along with Connecticut Legal Services, sued the federal government in order to reunite two children in Connecticut who were separated from their parents under the administration's Zero Tolerance Policy. She shared that the team was ultimately able to secure the reunification of the families outside

of detention.

The Scholars were all very impressed with Parikh's talk, and many of them remarked that her commitment to justice was inspiring. Jenna Mu '22 said, "Reena inspires me to pursue my passions and stand up for what I believe in."

Welcome GPSP Class of 2022!



Photo: Rose Lincoln

Lazaro Alvelaez
Tampa, FL

Ellana Lawrence
Queens, NY

Kelli Rodrigues
Garfield, NJ

Robert Cerise
New Orleans, LA

Jack Manoog
Centerville, MA

Daniel Ulanovsky
Andover, MA

Grace Christenson
Bethesda, MD

Jenna Mu
Omaha, NE

Angelo Villadolid
Somerset, NJ

Joshua Fording
Tuscaloosa, AL

Peter Pinto
Mountainside, NJ

Jakob Weiss
Williamsburg, VA

Molly Funk
Bristol, VT

Gabriela Prostko
Woodside, NY

Aroub Yousuf
Chambersburg, PA

Brittney Gedeon
Somerville, MA

William Riherd
Diablo, CA

Alumni Announcements

Jeff Jonas '03 writes that Sienna Reese Jonas was born on August 7th. She, mom, and older sister Alexis are all doing great!

Andrew Steck '10 graduated with his PhD in economics this summer from Duke, and has accepted a tenure track position at the University of Toronto (Rotman School of Management) for the fall

Colleen Maher Ernst '11 served as Special Counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee during the recent Supreme Court confirmation process

Andrew Rivera '11 was recently named one of ten SEA-HVO (Society for Education in Anesthesia - Health Volunteers Overseas) fellows nationally, and spent a month volunteering providing anesthesia and educating providers in Malawi

Mary Kate Cahill '17 was hired full-time onto the Illinois House Democrats Research and Appropriations Staff, and is assigned to a new House Committee: Health Care Licenses

Hagop Toghramadjian '17 got married on August 4th to Natasha Bednarz, MCAS '17. She is beginning her PhD in seismology at Harvard University and he is attending Harvard Law School



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