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Total Immersion College Bridge Course

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This January, we five students at Williams College have been taking a month-long, total immersion course in Tournament Bridge. Although several of us had played some bridge prior to the course, we all were—and still consider ourselves—beginners. The first several weeks of January consisted of daily bridge boot camp from our professor Frank Morgan, coupled with sessions at the nearby Pembury bridge club. After these busy two weeks, we arrived Wednesday morning at the District Three Winter Regional in Rye, New York, anxious and excited.

From our arrival to our departure, we were met with kindness and fondness. Our delegation received tremendous support and enthusiasm from all the tournament officials, particularly Joan Gerard and Cheryl Porter-Garofalo. Hospitality came from our fellow competitors as well. Although surprised, they were delighted to see college kids at the event, and kindly offered frequent advice.

While the welcoming environment made our stay all the more enjoyable, we found that bridge does have a charm of its own. It demands and develops an array of qualities from those who play it. Creativity, concentration, and resilience are all crucial in a successful bridge player. Few players will see the same hand twice, which makes each game a new, fresh challenge. These aspects combine to make bridge a uniquely engaging game, one that can be a lifelong hobby for those who choose to pursue it.

Here's one hand we enjoyed.

Board 26 1/23/2013 Pembury Bridge Club

North: S-107
H-AQ109542
D-K106
C-A

West: S-5
H-J763
D-Q9852
C-864

East: S-KQJ82
H-K
D-73
C-K10932

South: S-A9643
H-8
D-AJ4
C-QJ75

Both are vulnerable. East is dealer.

North	East	South	West
	1S	2C	Pass
2H	Pass	2NT	Pass
3D	Pass	3NT	Pass
4H	Pass	Pass	Pass

Bidding:

East here has 12 HCP and a very distributional hand with 5 spades and clubs, and so he opens 1S. South, with 12 HCP and a singleton heart, makes a questionable 2C overall. West, with only 3 HCP, passes. North, with 7 hearts and 13 HCP, knowing that he and his partner are going to game but not sure where, bids 2H. East passes. South, not liking hearts, but having controls in all the other suits, bids 2NT. North doesn't like NT, but he can't rebid their hearts so he needs to make a forcing bid, which here is 3D. South, still unable to support hearts, bids 3NT. North has a tough choice here, but expects South, bidding NT, to have at least 1 heart, so he bids 4H and plays it there.

The Play:

East leads the King of Spades, and Dummy wins the Ace. On a heart from the board West plays low, and North has to choose between finessing the King or Jack, or hoping that the hearts split 4-1 and the King is a singleton, which is the case here but extremely unlikely. If North plays the

Ace, they could make 5H, but if they don't they might even go down at 4H if they misguess the diamonds, losing two hearts, a spade, and a diamond. Indeed, that's how two members of our class, Neeko and Caroline, got a top board defending, after wisely refraining from breaking diamonds themselves.

With Rye behind us and the final days of our bridge class underway we are forced to start thinking about the ominous workload of the coming semester. Our classes, sports and clubs will take up the time that we relished in devoting to bridge this past month. That said, this will not be the end of our bridge-playing careers. We are starting a bridge club at our school where we can play together and expose classmates to the game. We will compete in the upcoming collegiate championships and make trips to the local bridge club as often as possible. Though it will be some time before any of us have another full free month to devote to bridge, we have all developed a love for the game that will keep us playing for a long time. For that we are grateful to our many generous friends and opponents as well as to our devout and enthusiastic professor.

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Paul Freidrich, Neeko Gardner, Ben Hoyle, Professor Frank Morgan, Caroline Atwood, and Llewellyn Smith at the Rye Regional