After five strenuous weeks of academic courses, elective classes, ACT prep, evening activities, and Friday morning workshops; forty of the sixty students from the Upward Bound Summer Program of 2008 were given the opportunity to travel to Pittsburgh, PA. It was an extraordinary learning experience for the students and staff. It gave each student a new exciting perspective on college education, the east coast lifestyle, and many lessons they couldn’t have acquired otherwise. With a group of first generation and low income students, it came to no surprise that this heart-felt trip was filled with countless first experiences for many.

First were the college visits to Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh. Students were impressed by their excellent academic tracks, strong scholarship opportunities as well as the infamous Cathedral of Learning, one of only two such architectural cathedrals dedicated to education in the world.

During the week long trip, students were able to meet Panther Bior and his wife, Awel. Panther Bior was one of three of the Lost Boys of Sudan featured in the critically-acclaimed documentary “God Grew Tired of Us.” The students watched the movie earlier in the summer and learned about Panther, John and Daniel’s extraordinary journey to America and the many new obstacles they faced with housing, employment and education. After living through a ten year civil war in their country and surviving two thousand miles of walking to refugee camps, the three had grown into men who had never experienced electricity, indoor plumbing, or even the concept of an apartment. Students were able to discuss Panther’s inspiring achievements as a person who just received his Bachelor’s Degree from Point Park University in Accounting, while still working two jobs, bringing his wife, Awel, to the United States and managing to support his family and community back in Sudan. Meeting with Panther left students with a new insight and gave them a motivational mindset before they visited Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh later that week.

While in Pittsburgh, students were able to visit many attractions which opened their eyes to a culturally different atmosphere. They went to the Benedum Center to watch the blues musical “Smokey Joe’s Café,” visited the Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium, ventured around the Carnegie Science Center, rode the Duquesne Incline to the mountain top, and enjoyed an educational half-day bus tour of the Pittsburgh area, learning about the city’s magnificent history. On top of these educational experiences, students were able to enjoy a day at Kennywood Amusement Park and shop around at the Robinson Mall.

The week ended with an intense reflection activity of the staff, students and summer college student staff. An amazing exchange occurred including expressions of gratitude and advice, lessons learned over the course of the summer, and goal setting as proud first generation students for the coming academic year. Students and even alums gave powerful testimonials about the value of the program and how critical it is to take advantage of it now while they have this most precious opportunity. The Beloit College Upward Bound Program solidified its bond as a family – reminding ourselves to look out for each other and to forge ahead into the new school year with confidence, love and friendship.

-Kim Linson
Beloit College Upward Bound Alumna
Class of 2008