

My CTY Summer Program Impressions

Tomáš Kremel, Gymnázium Jakuba Škody Komenského, Přerov

In this report I would like to say something about three weeks I have spent at CTY, about what had preceded and what has followed. Firstly, this possibility was enabled by AFCSLS and I am really glad that I could take part in the program.

Everything started with a recommendation from my friend. When I read something more about program I was excited, so I said to myself - why not? And I tried it. I wrote the application, the essay... And I nervously awaited results. And - I did it! The door to the interview round opened. The nerves have returned as I prepared for my interview. You do not know what will impress judges - whether or not to say this, mention that... It is truly stressful. However, to my surprise and excitement, I was chosen a winner!

The immediate feeling of happiness and elation from the news was extremely satisfying but there were still many things to do. There were many forms, emails of correspondence, and packing. Although I knew a little about what was awaiting at Princeton, the destination of my choice, I had no idea of what to expect. As you can imagine, an experience could be drastically different from expectations researching on the Internet.

Suddenly, the day of our departure came. At Prague's airport I met my companions with Mr. Herman and in very friendly atmosphere we waited for our flight. After a long time spent in the plane, where we watched movies, listened to music, and slept, we arrived at Princeton. We received very warm welcome from CTY staff and from other students who already arrived.

Within the next few hours we were introducing ourselves and getting to know the new people with whom we should live for the next three weeks.

Now I would like to share my experiences and opinions. The school, our course, everything was literally awesome - I was attending Science, technology and public policy course. Our instructor was Kelli Barr. In this course we were talking about these topics individually as well as about how science, technology and public policy interact in the current world. Also, in addition to general principles, we were focusing on particular issues like energetic supply, education, GMOs and other.

What I consider to be really important is that I was able to learn from a totally different educational system and - I found it better than ours. Comprehensive course readings contained lots of articles, parts from multiple books etc. What was very surprising and unusual was how the ideas presented in readings were linked, making our learning extremely effective. I think these summer programs in the United States fulfill the highest standards and demands.

Of course, the quality of a course also depends on the instructor. From this point of view we were having somebody who loves her job and what she is doing. Our lessons brought us a lot of

conversations about a given theme, further debates, presentations on different topics; it was a really specific and special experience.

As far as free time activities are concerned, we could see that everyone was really trying to make our stay at Princeton as convenient and fun as possible, so everyday lists of activities were quite long with a broad spectrum of possible options. You could play, for instance, ultimate frisbee, soccer, basketball as well as stay in the site and play cards, make a bracelet and other "passive" activities. It was simply amazing.

But what was inevitable was the end of time at the site. Unlike our new friends our journey did not end with Closing Ceremonies - we would spend the next three days in New York city! So after a hard and painful parting (likely most people there we saw for the last time in our lives) we reached the Elysee hotel on Manhattan where we met Mr. Herman and Mr. Brodsky once again (Mr. Brodsky was one from the judges in the interview round, so some of us had already known him).

What were we doing in NYC? We had several meetings with members of the American Fund for Czech and Slovak Leadership Studies. So we have met very interesting and friendly people - donors of our program who wanted to get to know us - the students they support. But most of the time we were walking across Manhattan. It was great time. We saw, for example, Brooklyn Bridge, Chinatown, the Statue of Liberty and much more. One from the most photogenic moments was the view from the tip of Rockefeller Center. Monday morning before returning home we visited the Museum of Modern Art. That is our last memory from the stay. We departed from JFK full of impressions and memories.

I must repeat all this was incredible and motivating experience for next efforts and work. Princeton is probably the best possibility to meet American educational system before a college. Like I said above, everybody was trying to make everything best for us. On the other hand, I consider the supervision there to be quite strange for students from the Czech Republic. Sometimes it was almost comic, otherwise it was sad and another time even bothering. One experience – we were not able to go to Whitman College, where our rooms were, because outside was storming. When we finally pass through the door we could see that everything was dry. “Really?” Everyone was upset. And why? Staff was just afraid of us getting hit by lightning or they have to be afraid, but still... I definitely do not want to discourage anybody from trying. Something like this occurred only in a few cases. One recommendation - go for it, it is the best!

At the end of my report I would like to say great thank you again to the American Fund for Czech and Slovak Leadership Studies. Thank you for this opportunity, the experiences, getting to meet people, and to see many incredible things. I am glad I could meet my donors, that I could speak with you and that we have some common memories. Hopefully we will meet and talk sometime again. Hopefully I will visit the US again and meet my new friends. Hopefully...