

My CTY Summer Program Impressions

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I, as one of the few, have had the chance to experience the CTY Summer Program. From the very beginning of this experience when I learned about the scholarship until the last moments that we spent in New York sightseeing, there were many amazing moments. But, of course, it was not only unicorns and rainbows. There were some troubles and confusion sometimes. Even though not everything was as I imagined, participating in this program was the best thing I have ever experienced.

The whole experience started when I went through the whole application process and I found out I was selected for the program. That's when the troubles started. I immediately became overwhelmed by all the bureaucracy. Even though I had to do all those quite amusing papers like claiming I am not a prostitute, I was still so excited to go there that nothing could spoil the trip. But then I got to the point when I could choose a subject. You can imagine my disappointment, when I – a big fan of mathematics – did not have the option to choose something mathematics related. But after my sadness passed I realized the offer was pretty great. I chose international politics and human rights because as a debater I should and wanted to be skilled in those areas.

I was so excited. The time between finding out I got a scholarship and the time we went there seemed like forever. Fortunately, Linda Noell was always emailing us every little step that it made us feel the start of the program is not that far away. Also, she was the person that guided me through all that mess with forms and visas and helped me with everything I needed to help with.

After surviving those forever-lasting days we finally met at the airport. We got on a plane and flew towards the amazing experience. The flight, like those long flights usually are, was quite terrible. When finally landed in Newark feeling victorious, we still had to get to Princeton, which seemed like forever. But we managed to get there even though we were all terribly jet-lagged and exhausted. When we arrived at the site and opened the door, there were people welcoming us with warm smiles. And warm pizza... which was at that time much more important because we were pretty hungry. As we were literally feasting on pizza, I again realized what a great experience is ahead of me.

After filling our stomachs, we got information about our courses. I was so surprised when I found out the name of our course book. It was "Theories of International Politics and ZOMBIES". I was talking with a friend that it sounded cool when my soon-to-be teacher heard that. Therefore, we started talking and I got to know her. I could already tell that she would be an amazing teacher. And I was right. After three weeks of studying, I learned so much about international politics. And it was fun! We simulated behavior of states according to various theories in case of zombie outbreak. We learned about international economy by simulating it. We got Hershey kisses and pretended to be a state and our wealth was the chocolate. And then we ate them. When we were talking about tragedy of the commons we watched Lorax. Of course, there were boring parts also. We had to read a lot. But the teacher still made it fun because she took us to the fountain and when we were finished we

could play there. To wrap it up, I learned as much as an undergraduate after a semester and it took me only three weeks and it was great fun.

The whole experience was not only about school. We could not learn all day and we naturally had some free time as well. I was really looking forward to just wandering around Princeton campus and even in the city, getting to know the culture and buying some souvenirs. The reality of our free time was far away from what I expected. We were not allowed to move anywhere unaccompanied by some adult and our free time was already planned for us. You can imagine I was really disappointed at first. But after a while it turned out to be awesome. They filled the time with a bunch of great activities we could choose from. During these activities I had an opportunity to meet many people from other classes. I could participate in a lot of sports like football, basketball, volleyball or ultimate frisbee. Also, there we played some pretty interesting games that I have never heard of before. For example, my favorite one was Prison Break where we had to escape from building and the adults were trying to shoot us with toy guns before we could escape. That said, my plans were not actually ruined. We even got an official campus tour with a guide and there were trips to town every weekend.

The last aspect of this trip was kind of hidden until the last day of the program. There was this tradition on the last day called "passion fruit". It was about getting up at 5am, going outside, sitting in a circle, talking and drinking juice as if it was peace pipe. I did not really feel like waking up at 5am but since it was last day, I did. We were sitting there and people brave enough were giving speeches how great it was here. As those people were standing in the center of the circle – talking about how great people they met and how great experiences they had, and some of them were even crying how they are going to miss this place – I realized that the best part was actually meeting these people. I met, talked and done things with so many different people from different cultures. Now I have friends in the U.S., Russia, Israel, Hong Kong, Jordan and India. And these people are very different from those living in Slovakia or in the Czech Republic. They have very different opinions, ideas and culture. From this wonderful experience, I must say that enjoyed meeting so many new and interesting people the most. Also I made many good friends and I am planning to visit some of them soon.

Lastly (or maybe I should say finally), after the end of the program we had a three day long trip in New York City; thanks to Mr. Herman and Mr. Brodsky who took us there. We saw every important monument in the city and we ate pizza, cheesecakes and different cuisines including Chinese. We even went to a Czech restaurant there. I was able to finally have some normal bread. We also had a chance to meet all of our "sponsors" – the members of the American Fund for Czech and Slovak Leadership Studies. We talked with them. I had great time because those people are amazing. All had their stories of how they got to America and how they got to be who they are today.

Unfortunately, that was where our experience ended. We flew back home with a head full of great memories. So, was it flawless? No. But, was it worth it? Definitely. I wish I could go there once more and I wish everybody could experience something as great as I did.