

My CTY Summer Program Experiences at Princeton

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“Three weeks for the rest of life” would be the motto of my experience. It was the first time I travelled overseas to the U.S. and the gain is considerable. First I will write about what I liked the most and then about what I would change.

Main mission of CTY is to support and encourage academic talent and achievement. In the whole three weeks students undergo 100 hours in classes divided into morning, afternoon and evening sessions. That is a huge space for introduction of any topic to understand deeply. Every class has about 10-15 students on average and therefore the availability of teacher for students is outstanding. It provides individual approach to each student. I attended Global Politics course and I had the feeling that teacher was there for me. Our class was extremely interactive and I find this as the biggest difference compared to classes in my regular school.

Theory we learned from presentations or reading was immediately applied in simulations and debates to acquaint its practical meaning in international relations and decision making of powerful leaders. Very often we worked in small teams of three to five students and were working out possible decision according to a given theory.

We focused on cases such as genocide, intervention, economic development, technology, ecology or game theory. In all these issues we looked at human rights and its violation or protection. We learned with the following methods: listening to teacher presentations, readings, writings, debating, simulating, watching movies and giving presentation to other students. As most efficient I found reading, debating, simulating and giving presentations. Also, we spend most of times doing exactly this. It is not at all about receiving and memorizing information. It is about using it and applying it. In this way, I personally learned the most and also improved my communication skills. The preparation and expertise of my teacher was excellent and as I talked with friends taking other courses, the level of teachers was very high overall. Most of them are professors at American universities. Classes were really challenging and fitting the talent of students.

The CTY summer program is also a great networking event. Afternoon activities help to connect almost two hundred students taking part in the program at Princeton. Every afternoon students could chose from more than 10 activities. These include anything from sports to writing poems or cloud watching. That provides great amount of possibilities. Students could choose anything in a particular day. These are the time when connections are established. Also it makes a great balance between learning and resting. Usually I chose sports and to my great surprise there were so many very good and passionate athletes. Also, I got to know several very interesting workouts that I will do at home as well.

After evening class we had another social time for about one hour. We stood or just sit on grass with other students or played board games. That was great time to meet everybody after working the whole day. Every Friday night we had dancing party. I guess all students enjoyed that, it was lot of fun dancing with so many students. There was almost no unstructured time during the week and it created a feeling of routine that passed very fast. Most students came from the U.S. but there were also students from Hong Kong, India, China or Porto Rico. From this perspective it was very interesting. With students from different countries we compared school systems, political systems or culture. That makes the time spent with them very exciting and in some cases also very funny. Everyone was very friendly and kind and I did not note any sign of disrespect. Moreover, students

very not talented only in one area but in many. We had violist, singers, sign language speakers, poets or athletes. That is what makes meeting such people so exciting and valuable.

What is important, every minute there was someone to ask if any problem occurred. There were specially qualified assistants, most of them university students, they followed our every step on campus and they were responsible for us.

Princeton provides very high quality of accommodation. Every day there was some new meal to explore. Dining hall was great place for me. There were meals from different world kitchens and cooked in delicious way. Students could eat and drink as much as they want. Also, college and rooms were very comfortable. I was in single room, disappointed at first, but then I was happy to have my own room. Actually, I went into my room just to sleep. During activities we visited several gymnasiums and grounds for volleyball, soccer or workouts on university campus. That even more evoked experience of university students. The equipment for activities were very sufficient. Finally, in all building was access to Wi-Fi.

Location is what makes this program special. Princeton University is one of the best in the world and visiting the campus is an awesome experience for students who consider studying abroad. During the program we had a chance to meet students studying there and ask them about admission, studying and social life. That gave us a deeper understanding of local education system and enlightened our possibilities. Princeton is very small town, however, the campus is very large and occupy considerable part of town. It is very restful place with plenty of green grass and trees that can suit to students. Classes took place in historical buildings.

When it comes to smallness I would spend less time watching movies in class. In three weeks we watched about three films and several videos those take more than ten hours – 10% of class. That is too much and I would rather spend it on more efficient methods of learning mentioned above. Further, the weekend activities were quiet poor. At the morning we had free time but we had to spend it in hall. Some students were sleeping or reading in mornings. After lunch we could chose watching film or do town walk (shopping). I would prefer to play some team game instead that would be more active and interesting.

I want to stress again that these three weeks are not just these three weeks. The community and connections are there forever and not only with friends I met there but also with teacher we are in touch and can ask for help whenever we want.

I noted some things those differ from Czech Republic. First what struck me were no fences along the houses in town. I am not sure if it is around whole U.S. but as I asked it is normal in this area because of low crime rate. Further, you feel more in touch with your neighbours and the relationships are probably a lot better than in Czech Republic where no one would think about no fence between himself and his neighbours.

Second thing I found out were prices without tax in shops. Without tax included you see the value that company gets from selling it. People are more aware of tax and probably have feeling that they give money to state budget.

Further, I was astonished how lot of common things are automatic. For instance, device for ejecting of soap in bathroom or automatic flushing. It makes life a lot more comfortable.

One negative difference I note is that American students disliked food in dining halls. I wonder what they eat at home or in their schools but if I compare what we get in my school it is way worse than we got in Princeton. All students from Czech and Slovak Republic agreed on this that meal in

dining halls was exceptionally good. I felt like eating in restaurant and therefore it scared me a bit how someone can dislike it.

Great difference is in educational system and specifically that in Czech Republic students are more forced to memorizing and learning a lot in many subjects. For example, in ours gymnasiums we have thirteen subjects that we learn all the time. In U.S. students chose about five courses for a whole year. In Czech Republic we have wider scale of subjects every student has to go through. Talking with other students I find that U.S.'s schools put more pressure on individuality of every student, applying theory into praxis and probably on supporting "soft skills" more through discussions. Also, in U.S. afterschool activities are bound to school and students do them with schoolmates and in school teams. In Czech Republic, school do not care about what you do after school. What I saw, American way leads students to exercise more.

Also, there is more humid weather and people get sweaty very fast.

After three weeks of hard work, all Czech and Slovak students were honoured by visiting New York City. It always has been my dream to visit this city and see all the skyscrapers. Thanks to Mr. Henry Kallan we could stay in one of his luxury hotels in Manhattan. It was so inspirational to meeting and talking to him. In NYC we visited most famous sights like Statue of Liberty, Central Park, Ground Zero, Time Square or Wall Street. Extraordinary was visiting the Museum of Modern Arts and seeing among others works of Pablo Picasso. Also we spent some times in Chinatown and that was great experience for me and first time I tried Chinese food. Further I experience how it is to take a New Yorkers subway - disgustingly hot and stale air and unfriendly tourniquet. Before I came to NYC based on movies I had imagined how amazing the city is. That actually did not change but to be honest, from the most of streets the skyscrapers were not so big deal as I had imagined before. Most of them are just monsters without any special architecture, very often damaged or dirty. Things change when you go up to Rockefeller Centre and see the city from above. You are no more concerned about smallness but see all these tall buildings as one picture. From above, I have not seen a more amazing city.

I was so excited to meet successful and so nice Czech people and members of AFCSLS and Martin Dvorak, the Czech Consul General. After these meetings I really feel our responsibility for future of Czech talents.

Thank AFCSLS for enabling me to experience such inspiring three weeks.