



Spring 2016 Newsletter



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International Student Support
at American Councils



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As students prepare to return to their home countries, we asked them to reflect on their experiences living in the U.S. for a year. The essays, photos, and quotes on the following pages are just a few highlights of the 2015-2016 program year.

How One Small Town Changed My Life **by Suraiya Saiwaree (YES-Thailand / Johnsonburg, PA)**

There are many things that I will miss when I go back home. First of all, I will miss my host family. I will miss when we spend time together, miss when they always take me to many beautiful places, miss when they always make different kinds of food and make me try them, and miss all of the desserts that my host sister makes for us. This family made my life change a lot; I grew up more. I will miss my best friend Alondra and the time that we were together and did fun stuff. I will miss American high school life. Last of all, I will miss all the things that surrounded me, such as big trees, flowers, all type of animals. I will miss this small town, Johnsonburg, so much.

Johnsonburg was unexpected. My town changed my life. In this town, I learnt everything new. The first time I came here, I thought, "This town is so beautiful and peaceful." It is so different from my hometown. The kids in school are not mean at all. They always help me, like the first week of school when I couldn't open a locker at all. I joined cross country and cheerleading. I didn't expect that I will run that far, so this is my new experience that I will never forget. Also, I had really good time with cheering. I love all of the people in my team and my coach. I didn't expect that all of the people here would give me a warm welcome, and I got the most amazing experiences ever.



When I go back home, me and my Thai friends that joined the YES program will gather together to help our communities. We will go to rural areas in Thailand and teach English for the kids or make some food for poor people. I will share my experiences.

If you want to be an exchange student, I would like to say prepare your mind. Unexpected things always happen, and you will have the best life ever.



My Experience in American High School by Muhammad Zaib (YES-Pakistan / Willsboro, NY)

The most important thing I will miss about the U.S. is high school. My high school provides various resources to help students choose their own career. It's important because it helps society to be free and to do whatever a person wants. Besides, high school is fun. Joining clubs, sports, art, theater, carpentry, and being a part of student council has given me the ability to be a good leader. The high school teaches students how to be a better part of society by going out in the community and helping to make it greener, better, and more prosperous. The



Booster Club is also fun because it's provided opportunities to interact with people, clubs, and leaders. This is true inspiration for young people like me because, from a very small age, they know and have knowledge about society how to interact with different people.

The high school has given me a lot of opportunities in the form of sports, drama, and clubs. It showed how to be a part of society and how I can be a role model for the young members of society. High school is the best part of exchange, and I will miss high school because it changed my personality, my habits, and my way of life.



Getting Involved in School Activities by Khanoum Gevorgian (FLEX-Armenia / Waimea, HI)

All the sports I participated in were memorable to me and I would like to explain why. The first sport I joined was volleyball. It is such a competitive and hard sport. I never played with the team, but since I wanted to stay, they suggested me to be a manager for the Junior Varsity team. I never learned how to play volleyball as well as they did, but I learned how to be a part of the team. I learned how to be a coach and how to keep the team unique. Another sport experience was the paddling team. This gave me the most memorable moments. I had never seen a canoe or even heard of it! My most memorable moment from this sport was when the canoe flipped over and I had to collect all the paddles. Now I know how to swim and how to paddle and I have something to tell the kids in my school about a thing they have never seen and never heard of.

There are many other things I learned during this few months, but the last one I want to mention is my band class. I never imagined playing an instrument or listening to classical music or being in the band, and I did it. In two months, my band teacher taught me how to play a tenor saxophone and on the third month, I joined the whole group and started to improve my skill. Now I am proud to say that I know how to play a saxophone!

A Reflection on Freedom of Speech

by Tasawar Drupak (YES-Bangladesh / Lovettsville, VA)

Freedom of Speech: the one thing every human craves but often does not receive. Being able to speak out against what is wrong without fear of persecution is what we need in order to advance as a united species. Silencing the voices of those who think differently is a surefire way of holding back progress. The one thing I will miss most about America is the freedom to speak my mind without being forced to alter my views in accordance to what is considered normal.

Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country. Our cultural values are very much intertwined with the religious values of Islam, making our country strongly conservative in most cases. In recent years, many voices have been silenced for speaking out against different issues, be they right or wrong. Living and learning the American way of life and society for the past 8 months, I can see why that can be the single most important obstacle withholding Bangladesh from progressing in the world. My experience has taught me that tolerance and respect for those with perspectives and/or ideals different from your own will only enrich society, even if you don't necessarily agree with them. I hope to change this attitude of intolerance in Bangladesh when I go home. We, the youth, are the future, and the future starts in the present. This experience has been more insightful than I would've previously thought and even though I will miss this, I will definitely start the trend back home.



Is America What You Expected?

39% of you said America is better than you expected
46% of you said America is different from what you expected
15% of you said America is what you expected

Some of the things that I saw in the U.S. were not the same as I expected and it surprised me in different ways. It is very different from what I was used to in Ukraine. The improving of my spoken and written English helped me a lot in expressing my opinion to others and communicating with people.

Anna Kidalova (FLEX-Ukraine / St. Charles, MO)





What was your most memorable day in the U.S.?

It was maybe my first month here. I still didn't have that feeling that I am actually here. It was Monday after school, and I was exhausted. I went into my host family's house and I could smell a very known smell that I haven't smelled in a month! My dad prepared for me traditional food from my country. That changed my day totally. In that moment, I felt like that's the right place at the right time to be. And I loved that feeling. And after that he told me how much he appreciates everything that I do here and how he is blessed to have one more daughter. I couldn't believe how such a bad day can become the "best day in your life" after just few seconds of attention.

Seida Djerlek (A-SMYLE-Serbia / Godley, TX)

I'm going to talk about one of my favorite experiences in the U.S., but there are several ones that I will never forget. The Civic Education Week was an amazing week, and when I stepped on that plane to come back to Hawaii, I knew that everything I learned and everyone I got close with will forever have a special place in my heart. In about 6 days, I got to know funny roommates, many other people in the conference, mentors, and 4 other exchange students who definitely were the highlight of that week for me. Every second I spent in D.C. was a lesson to me, and I really enjoyed my time there. I have a principle that wherever you are or what you do at that particular place, the people who you share that precious time with are the ones who make it perfect.

Eris Fani (YES-Albania / Lihue, HI)

What I enjoyed most in the U.S. is every day being a new experience for me. It is impossible for me to describe only a single day. From everything I had something to learn, starting with my host family, who made me feel at home from the very first day I came here, and ending with people I met only for 4 days who became really great friends of mine. I was always improving my education simply through speaking with people and learning more about them and their culture. Everything changed me a lot. I am open-minded. I have good ideas about how to incorporate projects, how to do something fun by helping others and how to simply enjoy every moment of my life.

Mihaela Codreanu (FLEX-Moldova / Edwardsville, IL)



**96% of you would recommend your exchange program
to someone in your home country**

I would definitely recommend this program to everyone. We all had our ups and downs but after we go through all this we are new people, ready to make an impact around us.

Anela Tiro (YES-Bosnia and Herzegovina / Chaska, MN)

I tell everybody to definitely take a chance of being a "foreign person" at least once in their life. That is the experience that will change their life.

Nina Kirakosyan (FLEX-Armenia / Burleson, TX)

Everything was just amazing. It was the best year of my life so far. When I come home, it's just going to be a new page. The year in the U.S. changes people!

Andriy Novytsky (FLEX-Ukraine / Waterloo, IA)