

INTRODUCTION

It has been a week since I came home from my very first trip to the US. I can without doubt say that it has been the time of my life. Spending a month in the US has given me lifelong friendships, invaluable knowledge and great memories!

When I prepared for this trip, a diary like the one I have written now would be very handy. I hope that I might help prospective participants in their application process, covering their need to know what they might expect from BFTF.

It is important to remember that this is a rigid academic program, and I had classes from 9 am to 5 pm every day at the university, and many presentations, speeches and tours in DC and Philadelphia. I found that every day was challenging, interesting and fun due to the esteemed professors and major players in media and diplomacy that contributed to the program.



Friday July 4, 2008 – The day before departure

I did the final preparations, packed my suitcase and enjoyed the beautiful weather. My good friend Anniken came over and I gave her the photos from our weekend at her house in Risør a couple of weeks earlier. My aunt and my cousin with her daughter visited, as I packed, to say goodbye. I had lasagna with my family at the balcony, and after dinner Ingrid and Ingrid came over at seven pm. We had a good time and even my neighbors cat dropped by. When the girls left I joined my parents at my aunt and uncle's house next door. I took a shower and went to bed. I had three hours left till departure!

Saturday July 5, 2008 – Departure!

I woke up at three o' clock, and forced myself to eat two slices of bread with apple marmalade. I went out on the balcony and enjoyed the sunrise with my mum. The newspapers had arrived, and I had a couple of minutes to read the headlines before we left for Oslo Airport. We checked in my luggage and I said goodbye to my parents. On the way through security I spotted Liv Ullmann. I sent a last text message to my parents and boarded the flight to Munich.



I found that Munich is an easy airport to navigate, and I had plenty of time to buy books and newspapers for my eight hour flight to Dulles, DC. I had the seat in the middle of the row in the middle of the plane, but luckily the seat next to me was never taken. Some twenty minutes after takeoff one of the stewards welcomed us to the flight to “Dullas”, I was shocked and thought “did he just say Dallas! Am I going to Dallas! I do not want to go to Dallas! This is outrageous, blasphemy!” and things like that until I realized that it was his distorted accent and not my navigation skills that had caused the entire plane to panic.

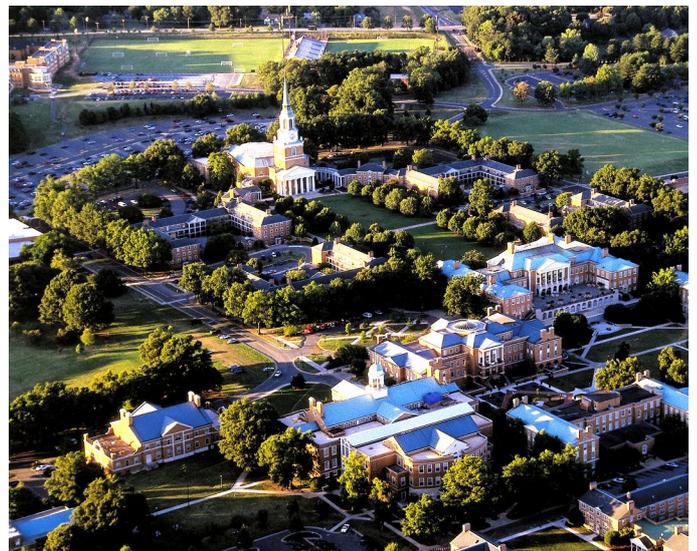
Dulles International Airport is by far the worst airport I can think of, and I recall my transfer as an escapade that included running between three terminal buildings, several security checks and endless queues. The people I know that lost their luggage this summer lost it at Dulles, and those who never made it to their flight, were at Dulles, traumatized in some ridiculous security control. But I have to say that Dulles was the only letdown I can think of this summer, and it was not that much of a problem at all.

The flight to Greensboro was short, and it took roughly an hour. In Greensboro I was met by volunteers for the BFTF and other participants. We collected our luggage and drove to Wake Forest. In the Babcock Residence Halls we met all the other participants, and we stayed up all night, waiting for the last arrivals. We were divided in boys and girls, and in our hall the boys lived in pairs. I stayed with David from Texas, and we had a great time together! I went to bed after some 30 hours of travel.

Meeting Uche, Susie and the others in Greensboro



Wake Forest University has a beautiful campus



Sunday July 6, 2008

We woke up quite early, and had breakfast in the great parlor. Breakfast the first week consisted mainly of fruit, cereals and snack bars, and the continental breakfast buffet in DC the next week was a great change! We were offered to visit a religious community, and I chose the synagogue. I have visited several Jewish communities in Europe, and it was interesting to see how different they are from the temple in Winston-Salem! The Rabbi had only been in North Carolina for five days, and the small parish there was quite a contrast to his hometown, Los Angeles.

Visiting the Temple



Monday July 7, 2008

Monday was the first day of classes. We were divided in two groups, and I was in the one that started with Social Movements class, taught by professor Nate French. We learned a lot in his class, and I always looked forward to the discussions we had. After class we had lunch in the cafeteria, named The Pit. We had to show our ID cards in the entrance, and confirm that we were “Ben Franklins”

The Pit is a buffet restaurant with a large salad bar, sandwiches, pizza, pasta, cereals, fruit, various dinner dishes and a huge dessert section including cookies, ice cream, cakes and chocolate mousse. I usually had a large salad, pasta and a slice of pizza for lunch. I had a dessert after every meal, including breakfast, which usually meant a couple of cakes and ice cream. The Pit was always very crowded because of all the camps that are being hosted by Wake Forest in July.

After lunch we went off to blogging class with Delphine Mass and Ross Smith. We learned how to create and maintain a blog, how to use several bookmarking and search tools in a modern student’s situation. Classes ended at five pm. Dinner was being held in the cafeteria as usual. In the afternoon we went off to one of the big lawns and played “capture the flag,” which is a funny game/sport that includes a lot of running and screaming!

When we had finished playing, Uche, David and I went off to see the Wait Chapel. We went back to our dorms in a beautiful sunset.

Blogging class with Ross Smith and Delphine Mass



Flandra, Uche and Christina in the Pit



Christina and I love rainbow cookies!



Tuesday July 8, 2008

The day went on with the classes we started on Monday. After dinner we played a funny game called Mafia, and after that we began organizing the game Killer, which went on for days. In Killer you are supposed to kill a person when you are all alone together with him or her. My victim was Bibigul. Her victim was Theo, but I never got to him because Flandra killed me the next day.

Agne taught us a funny samba and we had a great time! I danced with Flandra and Petya. Massinissa, the boy from Paris arrived when we were playing Mafia. He was the last person to join our group.

In the evening we also celebrated Artyom's birthday with cupcakes and a surprise party!



Wednesday July 9, 2008

We started the day with classes as usual, Social Movements with Dr French, and then Citizenship with Dr Beasley Von Burg (Just got married to Dr Von Burg), and we spent the first lecture or introducing each other, and I did Agne. After the introductions we had a heated debate about Iraq.

Dr Beasley Von Burg and me





At 4.30 pm we were sent off to a church nearby the university that had a large kitchen. The mentors had selected some of the students to prepare a dish from their country. I had brought smoked salmon from Norway, which turned out to be a success! I worked together with Dr Ron Von Burg on the scrambled eggs, and we were a great team!

When the dinner was over, we could go home to the dorms, and the group that not had prepared food had to do the dishes.



Dr Ron Von Burg and I



Thursday July 10, 2008

We had our last Social Movement lecture, and everyone wanted a photo with Dr French. After lunch, we had preparations for a simulation in Citizenship class with Dr Beasley Von Burg.

After dinner we were offered a trip to the mall, but I stayed in the dorms. I called my parents who at the moment were in Slovenia and Italy on vacation, and I wrote some emails to friends and family back in Norway. When the others returned from the mall, some of the boys went outside to play soccer.



The boy from France had fun ranking all the girls in photos, telling the rest of the boys how ugly he thought each and everyone of them were. He had also approached them earlier the same week telling them that they were fat. From his perspective this was a great way to break the ice and get to know us, but he later learned that what might be funny in Paris not always seems to be funny elsewhere. He wrote a big apology note the next day, and we had a great reconciliation.



Friday July 11, 2008

Friday was our last day of classes at Wake Forest, and we had a big simulation in Citizenship class with four imaginary countries, North, West, South and East. Each group were given a long list of facts about their country, and what they wanted to achieve on the summit. I belonged to the group that ruled the Democratic People's Republic of North, a regime with diminishing resources and almost non-existing civil rights. We had to act like many nations with similar profiles, and deny any accusation against us. We were after all "a strong and healthy democracy and our people loved us." The summit ended with a treaty between most of the countries, and North was quite pleased with the result.



After the simulation we were divided into new groups. These groups had to represent countries and NGO's in a far more important Darfur Simulation in the Department of State in DC. I represented China, and the China-group had a meeting in the WFU Debate Team headquarters with the mentor named Blake.

After dinner we went for a walk around campus, did our laundry and had a good time singing Disney songs in our dorm. We went to bed at one am.

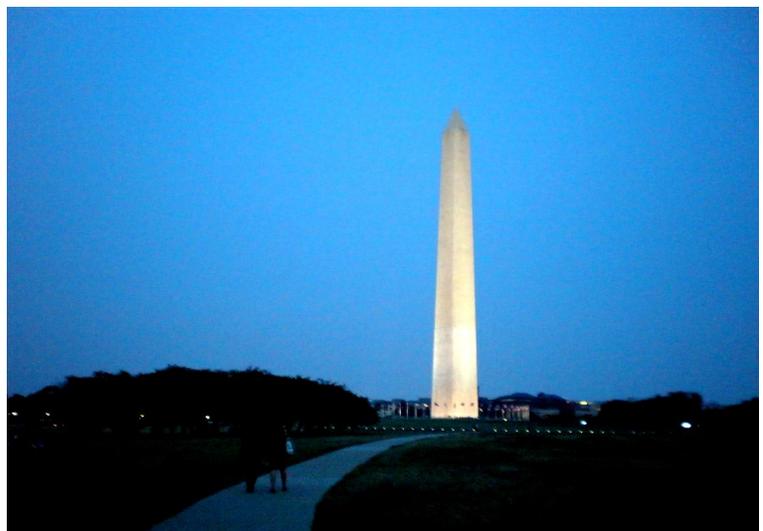


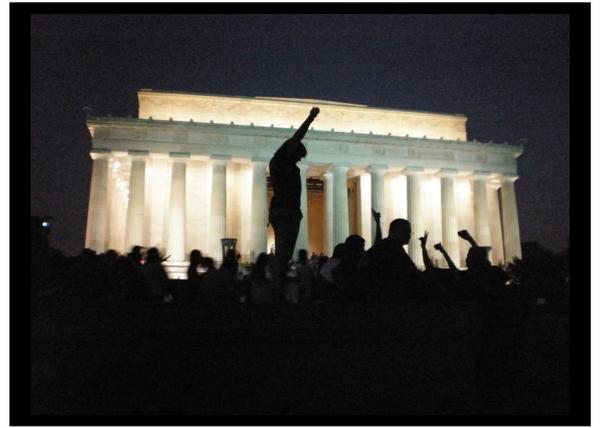
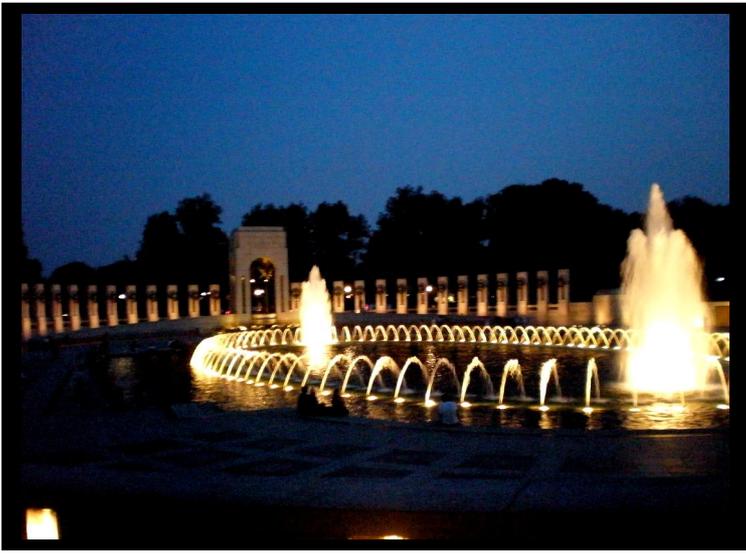
Saturday July 12, 2008

The bus left for Washington DC at 7.30 am. We had snacks on the bus, and watched the movie "How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days." We had dinner at Ponderosa Steak House, a buffet restaurant with lots of traditional American food. As we approached DC, traffic increased and we had plenty of time to take pictures of famous buildings as we entered the city. The bus left us at the Mall. We took a group picture in front of Capitol Hill, before we split into groups. I decided to go with the Americans to several museums instead of the monuments most of the Europeans wanted to see. We visited the Botanic Garden, the Native-American Museum and the Smithsonian Natural History Museum. Unfortunately we arrived in DC very late, and most of the museums were about to close. Therefore we did not have time to visit any of the art galleries most of us wanted to see. But we had a good time at the Natural History Museum anyway! We saw the Hope diamond, the dinosaur section, and many other incredible exhibitions.



We had dinner at a charming place called Ollie's. I had a turkey burger, and a Starbucks for dessert. On the way back to the bus we saw the White House. The rest of our group was waiting at the Lincoln memorial at 10 pm. The bus took us to Holiday Inn in Rosslyn, Arlington. I shared a room with a great view with Karl, Bobur and Artyom at 7th floor.





WASHINGTON DC



Sunday July 13, 2008

We woke up at 6.40 am, and had a continental breakfast in the Dogwood room. The bus left at 7.30 for Philadelphia. We picked up our guide in Virginia, and he gave us an introduction to the topics we were going to investigate as we entered Philadelphia. We had a quick stop at the art gallery and ran the stairs Rocky did in the movies with the same name. From the gallery we had a great view.



At 11 am we had a presentation at the National Constitution Center about the Constitution and its history. We stayed at the center till we had lunch at the Bourse Food Court at 1.15 pm. At 2.30 pm we had a study visit in the Independence Hall. We went outside and sat down at the lawn right next to the Independence Hall, and discussed independence and democracy.

A couple of hours later the bus picked us up at the National Constitution Center, and took us back to DC. We had to stay up late and work on the Darfur Simulation, (speeches, viewpoints, research and writing keynotes). We also had to iron our suits.



Monday July 14, 2008

We arrived State Department at the 23rd Street Entrance, and were escorted to the Main State rooms 1406 and 1408. At 9 am we were welcomed by Lea Perez (Director Office of Citizen Exchanges, Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs), who in addition to welcoming us, wanted to know who our hero is. I decided to tell her about my Norwegian hero, in a political and idealistic perspective, Henrik Wergeland. We were also welcomed by Carolyn Lantz (Youth Programs Division, Office of Citizen Exchanges, Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs) and Liza Davis (Deputy Director, Office of Press and Public Diplomacy, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs).



At 9.30 we were separated in two groups, I was in group one and headed off to the Darfur simulation. In advance we were given a debriefing by a person that works with Darfur on a daily basis. When the negotiations began we decided that Christina, the head of our group, was the one to present China's viewpoints and deliver the speech we had prepared. The State Department officers that were present were impressed by the knowledge we had about Darfur, and the degree we had managed to adapt ourselves to the countries we represented.



At 12 we had lunch, and at 1.30 pm we had a guided tour of the State Department Exhibit Hall and visited the Daily Press Briefing room. At 2.15 pm we met with Jeanne Briganti and Jon Berger, Public Diplomacy Officers in the European and Eurasian Affairs Bureau.



At about 5 pm Christina, Adrien, Flandra, Laura and I went over the bridge to Georgetown, the most charming part of DC. We met Alejandro, a friend of Christina from Miami at the Georgetown University, and explored the city. We had dinner at an Italian restaurant. I had Pizza Angelo, with pepperoni and meat. For dessert I and Flandra shared the most fantastic cheesecake. We followed Alejandro back to the University and saw his dorm and met some of his friends. We walked back to our hotel in the dark, and all agreed that it had been a wonderful day.

