

“A Great Opportunity”

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Non-degree Study of Law

The EducationUSA advising center in Gomel was very useful to me. I could easily retrieve information about various educational opportunities, as well as get practical advice on how to prepare for the international exams. But what is more important, I think, is that the advising center is crucial for helping alumni keep in touch and be able to organize local activities and projects.

Apart from the American education itself, which I found to be very useful in that it freed my mind and allowed me to look critically at many issues of the modern world, the most rewarding experiences I found included:

- **Living on a university campus:** student life activities and interaction with American and other international students is important, as it gives you more opportunities to understand another nation;
- **Being involved in community service projects:** participating in having the AIDS Quilt on campus raised my awareness about both the AIDS problem globally and how volunteering could be important for local communities;
- **Internships:** having an internship at the United Nations Headquarters in New York totally changed my perception of international organizations and their role in promoting democracy and human values.

These experiences led me to organize a non-governmental organization back in Belarus to support U.N. programs and engage in volunteer actions and community service.

Ithaca College was extremely supportive. I was met at the airport by a university member, welcomed to the campus, and assigned a mentor who could address various issues or provide help when necessary.

During written examinations, the instructors paid more attention to the content of what a student wrote than the misspelling of words or grammatical mistakes (common to international students). This enabled us to get appropriate grades without being discriminated against as foreigners.

Cultural and social support was very high as well. Since most of the foreign students were staying on campus over the vacations, the university organized various day trips for us and found us host families to stay with over winter break.

Education in the United States widened my understanding of American culture and the way American society is organized and works. Courses in U.S. history, literature, and government helped me better understand the keystones of democracy and look at the United States from a different perspective.

The experience of living with an American family is also highly beneficial as this allows you to see that ordinary people living in the United States share the same values as you.

After attending Ithaca, I won a scholarship and undertook a Magister Juris program at Oxford University—a very competitive program and difficult to get into. I think it was my exchange years in the United States which prepared me for the competition. I am now completing a PhD at the University of Manchester and hope, in the future, to find a job as an academic. I think without first studying in the United States, I would never have made it this far.

I offer the following survival tips for international students going to the United States:

- Do not be afraid of the culture shock—it does not hurt. Just be yourself, but also be considerate of other people;
- Make sure your parents at home have computer access to the Internet—the fastest and cheapest way to stay in touch and not feel disconnected from your home country;
- Do not be afraid to ask if there is something you need or do not know and do not be afraid of speaking English, even if it is not perfect (yet);
- Try to make the most out of your education: participate in various societies and meetings, undertake internships and everything else you can manage;
- Establish and maintain your relationship with local friends and your host family;
- Enjoy it. This is a great opportunity which can change your life. ■



Photo Courtesy of Pavel Repyeuski