

Personal report
Angelica Lazar, Romania

Dear Sirs,

It is with great pleasure that I am writing to you regarding the experience I had this summer at Notre Dame.

Let me begin first by expressing my gratitude for the financial help you granted me, without which this trip wouldn't have been made possible. I am sincerely grateful for your trust and generosity.

The month spent this summer in Notre Dame was a double achievement for me: firstly at an intellectual level, through classes attended and assignments accomplished, and secondly at a spiritual level, through the people met and the relationships developed with them.

During the last four years spent in Bucharest, besides the business school attended, I had access to domains toward which the system I had been educated in had not much respect, nor did it pay much attention to: the fields of social sciences and that of humanities. My increasing interest in the former was greatly rewarded during this summer through the courses I had the opportunity to follow at Notre Dame. The importance paid here for such fields of knowledge and the way this is conveyed to us by the outstanding professors was very much the way I always expected classes in an academic environment to be like. In the end I decided that what I feared for a while might have been the result of an indecisive spirit found at a crossroads in life, was actually my inner desire to follow such studies that answer to the questions regarding this world in a manner that is more appropriate to my spirit. So that beginning with this year I will pursue my studies in the field of Political Theory while beginning to practice in business, and I hope that the future will certify my choice was the good one for me.

To better understand my reasons for being so enchanted regarding this program, I think I should be explaining a bit the general context of my life at the moment of going to The States. The summer course occurred in the period between the end of the fourth year of study and the graduation exam. It was a difficult period for me: my life as a student depending extensively on family support was to end and I had to step into the realm of mature, fully responsible people, a world in which problems complicate a lot more than I was used to deal with previously. Doubts regarding the path I was to follow in life as well as some personal problems encountered this year at an unprecedented rate affected deeply my spirits. They weakened my hope and turned me into a disillusioned, skeptical person.

I must admit that I was a bit confused and surprised when I arrived at Notre Dame. I found people being very different in spirit and behavior than I was used to see every day around me in Bucharest. It took me some time until I understood what it was that they wanted from me. I think it wasn't before the last

night spent there – graduation and farewell party – that I fully understood what the main idea of the Phoenix Institute was. The very friendly nature of the people involved in the program – and I mean here primarily the organizers, their desire to convey good and friendship through knowledge and behavior was remarkable and caught us all in doing the same.

Probably, the thing that Phoenix spirit expresses best is tolerance. Bringing so many people together, people with different patterns, coming from different cultures, and having different educational backgrounds is the best environment where the lesson of tolerance can be learned. It was a breakthrough for me to discover that there are different forms of expressing the same values, and that is what makes the world more beautiful.

The micro-universe created by the Phoenix people at Notre Dame this summer –, as I believe happens every summer – is not a perfect one. But I think it offers one of the best alternatives for living together, for sharing and understanding each other. Conflicts are inevitable in a human's world, but the links that we create are stronger than any misunderstanding that might occur among us, and this is the most important lesson I learned. I feel that the Phoenix people form a web in which the strength of the net is ensured by the strength of each node and viceversa. It was due to living among these people that I felt my faith restored.

When I returned home my problems were just the same, but my attitude towards life was changed. I knew then I had friends I could rely on, people that do not measure me with worldly standards, that will care and appreciate me as long as I keep the faith.

I experienced there an extreme sense of comfort given by the fact that for the first time I tried to be nobody else but myself and act without making the effort to fit in any predetermined framework. And that was good.

These are the things regarding the Phoenix Institute program I wanted to share with you.

I hope I was short and concise and I managed to convey with my simple words the core of the feeling of joy that I bore in my heart when returning home.

Once again, please accept the expression of my sincere gratitude.

Faithfully yours,

Angelica Lazar / Romania

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