

Julia Greshik

August 20, 2018

WSIP Summer Report

KF Summer Study Abroad Office

### Magical Kraków

I would like to start this report of my four week time in Poland thanking the generous donors who made this trip possible and affordable! Kraków was a breathtaking and enchanting city and such an amazing learning experience at Jagiellonian University, inside and out of the classroom, that would not have been possible without you. Dziękuję bardzo, Pan i Pani! (Thank you very much, Sir and Mam!)

My goals leaving the USA were to gain understanding of Polish culture, history, and language, as well as to gain experience traveling and living in another country. I view life as a gift from God, and I believe God blessed me with this trip and the people and knowledge I gained from it to help me in my coming college years and throughout my life.

Since I was studying in Kraków there wasn't much time to travel outside of it, however, there was no need to because it was so rich in beauty and history that there was always something new to learn or visit. I had the opportunity to travel the city with my language class on a scavenger hunt, using our newly learned knowledge of directions, such as, proszę iść prosto, skreć w lewo/w prawo, jest po twojej lewej (please go straight, turn left/right, it's on your left). That took me to Kazimierz, the Jewish Quarter, and throughout the market, centered with the Stary Miasto (the Old City). St. Mary's was beautiful, along with the other Churches in Kraków we visited. It was hard to believe humans could construct such intricate and large structures, especially when looking up towards the altar and to the ceiling in St. Mary's. The architecture was some of the most beautiful I've ever seen, there, and throughout Kraków. Wawel was the first castle I've ever seen in person, so it will always be special to me. Kraków was also very walkable and not as crowded as I had imagined it would be. I wished more cities were structured like Kraków, because it was peaceful walking in the Planty (park) and through town without busy roads dominating the town. The sheer size of Kraków was impressive as well; if you hopped the wrong tram you could end up on the opposite side of town or lost, which was something I learned the hard way. The local cuisine was amazing and going to lunch with my

friends each day gave us a chance to explore Polish dishes such as gąbkę with a truffle sauce, fruit filled or mushroom filled pierogies, spinach and cheese naleśniki, and the classic obwarzanki bread. Every day a new cuisine or street had us mouthwatering at the talents of the Polish cooks and appreciating Kraków anew. After leaving lunch we were reminded of Poland's history as we strolled the historic streets.

I was happy to see that some western culture was present in Poland, so I didn't feel as such a stranger when I first arrived, and the Polish culture is still distinct for sure. I noticed the grocers at Biedronka didn't seem too midwest friendly, but it was something to get used to. I noticed the Polish are active with walking around Kraków and rollerblading in the Kraków meadow. I saw people exercising every day compared to back home and noticed that they are generally very fit, active, and individually stylish compared to America and what I see in my hometown. The Catholic and Christian presence was evident and it showed in the countless churches in Kraków and in the Christ-centered teachers and people I met. It was amazing to be able to learn more about John Paul II and be at the same places he was (not so long ago) during his time studying at Jagiellonian University and being Bishop of Kraków.

My goal going into the language classes was to become somewhat fluent in Polish, which was a hefty goal but which I felt I did meet. I really enjoyed being able to see and be immersed into another culture, and feel happy with the amount of knowledge I gained and the fluency I attained in the A1 Polish class, even though it's far from being truly fluent. It was a challenging course, but I'm so grateful to have had great instruction and feel the Pole in myself more than ever before having spent a month in Poland and becoming acquainted with the basics of Polish language. The language, as well as Polish history and The Jews in Poland, classes were intriguing and have left me with a desire to learn more about history and language all around the world.

Meeting friends from other countries was easily also one of the best parts of the program. I was impressed by their desires to learn more about Polish history and language, despite not being Polish themselves, and also of their different backgrounds, as my friends were from the UK, Australia, and different parts of the USA. They had such different backgrounds than me and I was happy to connect with them since they were all two to six years older than me; some already

in their graduate studies or starting a new job after the program was over. It has made me appreciate the world as a whole more for how wide and diverse it is in its cultures and languages.

Of the weekend excursions I took, Auschwitz was the most impactful. The Shoah (Holocaust) was a terrible time in history and so many Polish Jews were treated so inhumanely and killed. It left me deeply moved and with a sense of duty to experience life to the fullest, being always appreciative of what I have, remembering the victim's suffering, and to not let any small problems overtake my joyful and hopeful outlook on life, centered in Christ. Auschwitz will forever be in my memory and help me to honor those passed and to help promote peace and love in the world because of their sufferings. It took me days to mull over all the horrible facts and new knowledge of what had occurred to so many at Auschwitz and other death and work camps, again, not so long ago. I could see how deep the Holocaust affected most everyone in Poland, because grandfathers and relatives of my professors had been alive during that time and remembered the hardships and of nearly escaping death in that treacherous time.

Leaving Kraków after the four week program was over was a sad day, but I'm looking forward to someday returning with my parents and or siblings to visit the Kościuszko Mound and Schindler's factory and do more heritage research about my Polish great-grandpa. I had the best experience travelling I think possible, and I am filled with excitement for my future ahead. If that means travelling on vacation, through studying abroad again or for my job; I do not know yet. I do know that it will always be worth the time and money it would take to travel and live in another country, whatever the time-frame, based on the wonderful adventure I had in during this study abroad. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Kraków and am eager to experience more of Poland and other European countries. This was a one of a kind study abroad I was so fortunate to experience; words can't do Kraków or the study abroad trip justice: It was magical. Living in another country proved to be easier to adjust to than I had thought, and I feel as though Poland is my second home.