

El Pomar Trans-Atlantic Junior Fellowship  
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Feedback  
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The goal of the El Pomar Trans-Atlantic Junior Fellowship is to give three European graduate students insight into American society and especially its great nonprofit sector.

In five weeks a Swedish PhD student from Oxford, a young Polish politician and a Finnish journalist travelled from beautiful Colorado to lively Washington DC and met dozens of nonprofit professionals. What a great mix of people and meetings!

The El Pomar Fellowship was invented a few years ago in the in the back of a bus by two distinguished gentlemen who cared about future of Trans-Atlantic relations. Even though the Fellowship is relatively new, it is amazingly well coordinated, thanks to the hard work done by the young El Pomar Fellows and the support provided by the University of Colorado.

I hope the journey continues and more people get to experience the El Pomar Fellowship. The Fellowship proved to be the most intense and eye-opening learning experience of my life. It was also the trip of a lifetime in an intellectually inspiring and spectacular company. I can not imagine a better host than the El Pomar Foundation, a true embodiment of the American culture of giving.

El Pomar is the largest foundation around the Colorado area, which means that it has its hands everywhere. Through the Foundation's lens one can get a comprehensive picture of the resounding effect a nonprofit organization can have on both local and state affairs.

First of all, a viable nonprofit sector is something that the European countries lack. Of course, the nonprofit sector faces challenges in the US as well. The business of giving is still down after the financial crises. At the same time, the nonprofit sector is lobbying to preserve its tax incentives.

During our trip, we also heard that El Pomar might face some budget cuts because of the present economic hardship and market turmoil. It is always easy to cut from "foreign operations", but I would like emphasize the importance of exposing young professionals to these kinds of cultural experiences. The El Pomar Trans-Atlantic Junior Fellowship is a unique opportunity to learn about the American way of life.

In the US, one can find great institutions like El Pomar along with other similar actors in places you would not expect. Many of those institutions are also local powerhouses with long traditions. The good people at El Pomar respect their formidable history but are not held captive by it.

It was a true privilege to be involved in the activities of the El Pomar foundation even for a short period of time and to witness the passion and dedication of its staff. The people involved with El Pomar honestly want to make a difference. On the basis of what we experienced in Colorado, they really can and do make a difference. In Europe, we tend to trust our respective governments. During

the Fellowship, I learned that nonprofit organizations can come up with amazingly creative solutions for example in providing social services.

Out of our five-week trip, we spent three weeks in Colorado Springs witnessing the scale and scope of El Pomar's activities. Even when compared with our high profile meetings (for example with Costa Rica's former Vice President and a true intellectual, Brookings Senior Fellow Kevin Casas-Zamora!) in Washington DC, this was probably the most insightful period of the Fellowship. I have researched Trans-Atlantic relations in my thesis and travelled before in the East Coast, but until now I have lacked specific understanding of state level politics in the US. compared with European societies, a strong emphasis on localism or state level decision making is a very prominent feature of American politics.

Another notable thing that we often discussed among the European fellows is the emphasis on leadership skills in the US. For example, the Chancellor's Leadership Course at the University of Colorado is a selective undergraduate program that educates future leaders. I was astonished by their positive attitude and enthusiastic professionalism at such an early age. Another great example are the young fellows of the El Pomar Foundation. From an European perspective, their two-year nonprofit leadership program is unique. In Finland, both programs would be revolutionary.

After three weeks in Colorado we flew to DC, the greatest place on earth for a political junkie like me. What a fantastic time to explore the world of think tanks and national politics. In addition, our meetings with nonprofit lobbyists (especially from the Independent sector) gave us great insight into the nonprofit sector at the national level. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) is such a great hands-on organization that I wish I could have spent more time with them.

The El Pomar Trans-Atlantic Junior Fellowship program is great as it is and it would be a shame reduce the number of meetings. However, I would like encourage the organizers in the future to pick the most insightful activities and focus on them. For example, the Stanford Graduate and Charter School founder from Colorado was an inspirational character, but the meeting in an another charter school was a bit overlapping. We also visited two homeless shelters and met with the local newspaper twice. If possible, it would also be more useful to proceed with a looser schedule as there could be room for a nonprofit reading list, workshops or actual project work with El Pomar.

Or one could for example build a program focused more on the question of how to run a nonprofit organization. I think we learned the most by interacting with El Pomar fellows, employees and other nonprofit professionals. I love US politics and enjoyed my time greatly in DC but the contrasting experience that Colorado Springs and the El Pomar Foundation can offer is something very special.

If one wants to get a comprehensive view of all the segments of American society, understanding the nonprofit sector is crucial. Thus, I owe a debt of gratitude to the European and El Pomar Foundations for offering me a chance to explore the world of nonprofits in the US. I have always wanted to study in the US. Through your generosity, my dream is now closer to realization. In addition, I have always been in favor of greater Trans-Atlantic dialogue. There is no doubt that for me the El Pomar Fellowship will have a lifelong ideological, intellectual and professional meaning.