

Carlos Vazquez

DC Journal Week 8

Week 8, the final week. The feeling has not set in but it all feels so surreal, almost like this entire experience has been one big dream. One of those dreams that you have where when you wake up you want to try to fall back asleep because it is such a good dream! I can't believe how quickly I am writing this final journal, it feels like yesterday when I was notified that I was even selected to participate in this amazing opportunity. This week came with a lot of self-reflection in many ways, I still am in disbelief that a student from Glens Ferry, Idaho found himself in Washington DC interning at the Department of Education. Not only was I able to take part of an internship that is dedicated to its students, but I was able to learn so much and thanks to this experience I truly feel like I have grown so much. This makes me excited to go back home and share my experience with everyone. I would like to warn you in advance for this very long journal but I'm happy to say that week 8 was a very memorable one.

The final week of the internship as a HEP/CAMP intern is set up to assist the Office of Migrant Education in their Annual HEP/CAMP Director's Meeting (ADM). I was excited for many reasons, my CAMP Director, Evelina Arevalos-Martinez, was coming to D.C. and she was also bringing our CAMP program Advising Specialist, Christina, who is also my older sister. When I went to go pick up my sister at the airport on Sunday night, I remember that it was so crazy to think that not only was I in DC but now all of a sudden my sister is here with me. When I saw her I was really excited of course but I couldn't help to think "wow, I would have never imagined this interaction to take place here" before I knew it, there she was. Once we got back to her hotel, we met up with Evelina and to see both of these people in front of me at that setting was really strange. They both had such a huge impact in my first year at the university and they were now both here in DC where I had made so many memories.

Monday was the first day of the ADM so the 7 interns had to arrive a little early to the Department of Education to help assist the staff with anything for the day. The day was not very long in terms of the meeting because it was mostly an introduction of the rest of the week's program and also to get a chance to introduce the staff as well as the 7 of us interns. I was really excited to be able to get behind the podium to say a couple of words to the HEP/CAMP association. They of course are the ones who are putting in countless hours of work to help students like myself get a higher education and not only that they were also the ones who help give me this amazing opportunity. The day itself ended around lunch time but the association had scheduled Hill visits for us to get a chance to meet with the representatives and senators from our districts and state to go talk a little bit about HEP/CAMP and just how much it benefits the community in Idaho. This was a really fun experience as well because it gave me a chance to spend some time with the Directors from Lewis-Clark State College, Mary Crowell, from Boise State University, Michelle Kelley, the HEP Director for Community Council of Idaho, Mathew Tubbs, and of course my program the University of Idaho CAMP staff, Evelina and Christina. The visits themselves also went fairly successful I feel, I really enjoyed them because

the directors would like to introduce me as “the star of the show” to the Legislative Assistants because I was actually a CAMP student and I was in Washington DC.

After the hill visits were finished, the staff and I were able to go do so more “touristy” things in the city like go visit some of the monuments in the national mall. It was a little sad because I had gone to the monuments many times before and I kept avoiding the thought that this was one of the last times that I was able to get a chance to really see them and enjoy them but I was glad to do that with the company that I was with. Christina, Evelina, Mary, and I were the group that was looking at the monuments but I wanted to make sure that they would get a chance to see all of the major monuments in the area so I took them on a pretty length journey to go see the Franklin D Roosevelt monument as well as the Thomas Jefferson. They didn’t seem too happy with me because I set them on a longer trip than advertised, but in the end I think that they appreciated the trip and the time it took to get there. After the long journey, we all agreed that we were all starving so we wanted to go somewhere to eat. Once we decided where, we took an Uber to El Challan, a very good Peruvian restaurant that I had never gone to before but Evelina had recommended. The food was delicious and the company that we had was even better, it was really one of the best places that I had ate during my time in DC but also it was really memorable that I got to spend it with the people that I did.

The next day consisted of actual ADM programming so us interns were required to do some tasks throughout the day like assist the presenters or help with the question sessions. Although the tasks weren’t too difficult it was really interesting to sit down and have a look at the logistics that actually come with the HEP/CAMP programs. Not only that but it really gave me a chance to see somethings that many students would not really think about or notice, like the hard work that the directors have to put year round to make sure that their programs are able to function properly. After a long day of a lot of material that I did not completely understand, we once again had gone home to change and go out to dinner. The plan was originally for all of the interns to take out our Directors to eat at a place like Oyamel, but due to the fact that we weren’t able to get a big enough reservation it didn’t work out the way we had hoped. Evelina, Christina, Nestor and I were able to go still and enjoy some really delicious Mexican food followed by some Gelato at a nearby Gelato shop. I had been in DC for 8 weeks but I don’t think any two days were as delicious as these two were.

Wednesday was the last day in DC for many directors as it was the last day of the normal ADM schedule. The day again was not very long but you could feel that many of the directors were very tired from the very long week. One interesting thing that happened this day was that the HEP/CAMP association is producing a video of us interns and our experience here in DC and I was able to and give my interview with a staff member from Sacramento State University. When the day finished, I got a chance to spend the final hours with Christina and Evelina by going to a couple of museums. Unfortunately, it was a very hot day and we were all tired we only had a chance to go to the American-Indian Museum and the National Art Gallery. When we finished our little museum tours, we went back to the hotel to get their stuff ready and for

them to depart off to the airport. It was a little upsetting to see them go but I was also very thankful that I got to spend some time with them and of course I would also be seeing them both very soon.

Wednesday was also a little tough because one of the CHCI members was leaving early so we all had thrown him a little goodbye dinner at the apartments where the CHCI cohort are staying. Not only did they throw a dinner but the cohort also had the idea to give “Superlatives” to all of the members. It was actually a really cute and fun idea, but the entire night was very emotional because I knew that time was running short and after this I would not be able to spend time with some of the most amazing people that I have ever met. Seeing one of us leave so early was very difficult especially because he was such a big part of our CHCI family and the fact that he would not be able to spend the last days with us was really hard to acknowledge.

On Friday, we had our very last day of CHCI programming at the Headquarters. This entire day was very rough because it was the official last day that we were all going to be together, I remember so clearly our first day of Friday programming and just what I was feeling. To look back at all that has happened, how many feelings have changed and grew towards the people in that room compared to the day is absolutely amazing to think about. The sessions themselves were more aimed for us to focus on the fact that there are CHCI Alumni and just how great of an honor it is to be that, but also to continue to give back to the amazing program that serves a very important purpose in bringing young Latinx people into congressional offices. At the end of the session we were all asked to provide one word that we would best describe our 8 weeks as a part of CHCI and I felt that the best word to describe it all would be “Empowering”. This journey was very Empowering because being in a room full of individuals who are all aspiring to make a difference in our communities that is often time so marginalized, makes me realize that I cannot afford to hold back in the efforts that I work for in my community back in Idaho. The experience would not have been nearly as inspirational as it was if were not due to the people who surrounded me and to be able to be a part of it all was very empowering to me.

After our sessions, we had time to spend our last hours together but we also wanted to make sure to spend time with our friends who we met outside of the CHCI cohort as well. Something that we had been wanting to do for a long time was to go visit the National Harbor in Maryland a couple of miles away but we never had the chance to get around to it, therefore we wanted to make sure to go visit it on our last day. Jose, Bianca, Chris from the Department of Education, Angela, Nestor, and Nathan who were three of our friends from the Department of Energy, all took a trip to both see the beautiful location as well as eat at an amazing restaurant. Though we had never been there, we were told to go eat at a restaurant called Rosa Mexicana. It was a bittersweet to think that this would be the last time that we would be in the same room together but I could not be happier to be able to share this meal with this specific group of people. The night itself was one of my highlights of the entire summer because I could feel the positivity and joy that was spread around the table, not to mention we all got to eat a very

delicious meal. Out of the 8 weeks that I spent in DC, I think that the entrée that I had that night will go down as my absolute favorite, I could write a whole journal on that plate alone.

When we said our goodbyes, it was of course very difficult to face especially because it was a taste of what was to come when we would have to say goodbye to the entire CHCI cohort in a few hours. My flight would take off at 6:30 in the morning so I would be one of the first ones to have to depart back home, therefore I figured it would just be best if I did not sleep and stayed up with those who were willing to stay up with me.

Before leaving, we all met up in the kitchen at the apartments where the CHCI inters were staying and we all sat to reflect and say our goodbyes. As you could imagine, the night was filled with many tears and emotions but also lots of love and laughter. Even though I cannot say that I was close to every single one of them, I really felt that all of them cared for me and I for them, so it was hard to face the fact that I would not be seeing them anymore. There is no question that all of the individuals in that room are going to go on and achieve so many great things and I really hope to follow them through their journey from afar to see the happiness that comes in their lives.

Time was flying by and I had to leave in a matter of hours. I knew that this night was going to be an emotional one but I didn't really expect it to impact me as much as it did that night. I found myself in tears when I had to say goodbye to some of the closest friends that I made over the summer and the words that were exchanged in some of our final conversations were very difficult to take in. Though it was all emotional, I could not be more thankful to be able to share these moments with the people who allowed me to grow and learn from them along my journey.

Lucky enough, some of my closest friends stayed up with me and escorted me to the airport to say Goodbye one last time. It was difficult and more tears were shed but at the same time I was really thankful they went with me because they basically gave me instructions of what to do to get on the plane because if I would have gone by myself I would have been completely lost. After all of it, I found myself on the plane to head back home.

Although I was exhausted from the very long night, I still had a chance to reflect once again on the journey that I was fortunate enough to experience. The fact that I, a first-generation student from Glenns Ferry Idaho, was fortunate enough to go to Washington D.C. and take part of an amazing internship experience, still astonishes me. Through all the adversity and all the struggles that it took to get to where I am today, my heart is completely filled with passion. Passion to go on and motivate others like it was done for me, similar to the HEP/CAMP association and their initiatives to send students like myself to go on to do things like this. Also the University of Idaho and the amazing CAMP program we have there that is filled with people who are dedicated to their students. And of course, my family, the ones that always believed in me when I would not believe in myself; the best support system that a person could ask for. I hope to continue to make them proud and share experiences such as this one with them.

This will not be the end of my journey, but a big stepping stone for what is left to accomplish. I guess all that is left to say is, thank you.



