Students explore the Smithsonian during the Civic Education Workshop in Washington, DC.
Return Travel Information

Your return travel packet includes:

• Your electronic ticket
• Three FLEX baggage tags
• A check for your second checked bag*
• FLEX travel brochure
• A memo to your host family
• A letter from the Alumni Coordinator in your home country

*FLEX does not pay for a third checked bag or any overweight/oversize charges

Don't leave home TOO LATE and miss your flight.

Don't leave home without your PASSPORT.

If you miss your flight, DON’T LEAVE THE AIRPORT without getting a new flight assignment. Call us at 800-841-6460 for rebooking help!

Online Info

With the help of our website at flex.americancouncils.org or with the facebook.com/groups/FLEXReturnTravel Facebook page, you will be able to get the latest information about your travel such as:

• Airline contact information
• Baggage information
• Country-specific travel notes
• Return travel FAQs
• Security and packing tips
• Travel emergency and other guidelines

You will be receiving your return travel packets soon! If you don't receive a return travel packet ONE WEEK prior to your scheduled departure date, you MUST contact your placement organization for help.

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Avoid THESE TOP 3 FLEX Travel Mistakes

1. Don’t leave home TOO LATE and miss your flight.
2. Don’t leave home without your PASSPORT.
3. If you miss your flight, DON’T LEAVE THE AIRPORT without getting a new flight assignment. Call us at 800-841-6460 for rebooking help!
Congratulations to all for the successful completion of your GYSD projects! Visit www.gysd.org to learn about projects in your area. You can also post and share your own story, recruit volunteers, and be included in the GYSD regional and global project totals. Here are some highlights from your fellow FLEX students:

Tatyana Kazakova
Russia | Sacramento, CA

Tatyana spent her Global Youth Service Day cleaning houses and weeding gardens for the Ronald McDonald House charity.

Petros Mkheyan ‘15
Armenia | Kingsburg, CA

By organizing a board game night, Petros was able to collect over $200 to benefit one of his fellow classmates that was diagnosed with cancer at the beginning of the school year.

American Councils Hosts Third Annual Workshop for Youth Leaders in Teaching English

Thirty-two students representing 22 A-SMYLE, FLEX, and YES countries were chosen from 400 applicants to participate in the third annual Workshop for Youth Leaders in Teaching English (WYLTE) from March 29 - April 4, 2015.

Through interactive workshop sessions and guest speakers from ECA’s Office of English Language Programs (OELP), WYLTE students furthered their pedagogical knowledge in student-centered methodology and explored effective use of technology, classroom management, organization skills, and session design and delivery. Classroom observations at Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School, an award-winning and nationally recognized school for adult immigrants, offered participants an opportunity to see best teaching practices firsthand. Participants received feedback from teaching professionals with expertise in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), under whose mentorship each student produced a lesson plan to “teach” their peers at the end of the week.

The group had the opportunity to meet and talk with Dr. Mara Tekach, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Professional and Cultural Exchanges. Students were inspired by interacting with two WYLTE alumni who helped with the workshop and talked about their successful English teaching projects. Participants were inspired to implement projects in their home countries, through teaching and tutoring in schools, camps, and U.S. Government-sponsored programs. One participant said, “I really want to pay [the program] back somehow and I think a good way to do that is to implement everything I learned in my lesson plans and teach and help my community learn English.”
Gulnura Tukeshova  
Kyrgyzstan | Athens, GA

I have volunteered at Athens Church, at an ice-skating rink, and a soup kitchen. I like volunteering at the church because there I am able to work with children. We usually sing, dance, and read books. I am Muslim and I work in a Christian Church. I enjoy learning about this religion different from my own and sharing what I learn with other Muslims. You may know that in our world today, there is a lot of ignorance between Muslims and Christians, and this ignorance breeds fear. By encouraging understanding I would like to help create world peace. We are all equal and we can choose what religion is best for us.

When I volunteer I learn new information and ideas. I learn about American culture, history and lifestyle. I understand that we can improve our community by just doing the little things. Mother Teresa said: “If you cannot feed a hundred people, then just feed one.”

When I was volunteering at the soup kitchen in America, I had breakfast with homeless people. They were interested in my country. One thing really surprised me: I asked one man if he knew where Kyrgyzstan is. He said your country borders Kazakhstan, China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. He was a very intelligent man, as most people don’t know Central Asian geography. This taught me a lot of things; most importantly to not judge people by their circumstances. Volunteering here in America has inspired me to open a soup kitchen when I return to Kyrgyzstan. Our new free market economy has had a slow start which has been difficult, and the homeless population has grown. Eleven percent of Kyrgyz people live in poverty. Every few days approximately 10 people die from the freezing temperature or hunger. They live outdoors and eat food from the trash. It would be wonderful to feed them with a hot meal every day. It is our moral responsibility to help people in need.

Meylis Rahmanov  
Turkmenistan | Vancouver, WA

At Senior Living, I talk to the residents and tell them about my exchange experience so far. By listening to their unbelievable stories and talking about their lives I am able to improve my communication skills.

Rukhsora Sattorova  
Tajikistan | Visalia, CA

Most of my friends were interested in my country, so I gave as many presentations as possible. During International Education Week I gave presentations for students, administration, firefighters, the Kiwanis club and at a local middle school.

Aram Manukyan  
Armenia | Harrisburg, OR

I visited the Salem City Government with my local coordinator. I had a great tour with an amazing Guide. For me, it was really interesting to see how the government works and controls this huge state.
I volunteered in Concordia Language Village where we taught Russian to children adopted from Russia. There I started thinking how generous those parents are. They bring their children to camp every year and don’t let them forget their past. I liked teaching Russian, and we also organized Russian holiday Maslenitsa to feel Russian atmosphere. I always wanted to live somewhere abroad, but I realized that I love my country a lot and do not want to leave it.

Naira Yryskeldieva
Kyrgyzstan | Bemidji, MN

An interesting fact is that my host siblings are originally from Ukraine. It’s exciting to bring a little bit of Ukraine to them. Although political and economical situations in Ukraine are not perfect, we are staying optimistic. My host brother once told me ‘Because I’m a Ukrainian, I feel that you and I have a strong bond when we are together.’

Vladyslav Kulikov
Ukraine | Ashland WI

I discovered such a huge interest to American history and am glad I had a chance to find historical places here, like my state Capitol. The building always looked attractive for me from the outside however when I finally got inside I could hardly describe my feelings at this old magnificent piece of architecture. While we were enjoying a view of Topeka from the Capitol Dome, I figured out that the state motto is: ‘Ad astra per aspera, To the stars through difficulties.’ which is the motto of my school in Russia!

Anastasiya Grigoryeva
Russia | Topeka KS

I have a dream, and the great leaders of America inspire me to never give up, to fight for my future and for a better life. One day, I will be the president.

Olga Bostan
Moldova | Olympia, WA

My relationship with my host family is great, it feels like normal family, and I’m part of that family. We have a lot of fun together and sometimes we cook Georgian national dishes together.

Tornike Balakhashvili
Georgia | Haverhill, MA

Every exchange student has to represent their home countries well. I did this by presenting my country in church where I shared Azerbaijan culture, food, holidays, scenery and buildings.

Sara Gojayeva
Azerbaijan | Shoreview, MN
FLEX students representing 33 states came to Washington, DC in March to participate in the Civic Education Workshop. Students learned about “first freedoms,” universal rights, and grassroots engagement. These concepts were explored through a series of engaging and interactive activities and meetings with special guest speakers. Some highlights of the week were:

**Visit to the Newseum including a Media Ethics Seminar**
Students explored the impact that media has had in history around the world and learned about the ethical issues that journalists face.

**Alumni Leadership Discussion**
FLEX alumni Arzu Geybullayeva ’99 (Azerbaijan/California), Almas Kebekbayev ’08 (Kazakhstan/California), Lyudmyla Krasnytska, ’10 (Ukraine/Florida) and Hasmik Tonapetyan ’09 (Armenia/Texas) spoke to the students throughout the week about their successes as alumni and how to become engaged in their communities after their program.

**United States Department of State Briefing and Diplomatic Simulation**
Students took part in a meeting with U.S. Department of State officials on how U.S. foreign policy is developed and implemented before participating in an interactive simulation of diplomacy in action, *Crisis in the Oceans: Negotiating a Solution.*
Capitol Hill Day
Students spent the day on Capitol Hill attending 137 meetings with the senators, representatives, and Congressional staff of their U.S. host communities.

Current Issues Seminars
Students opted to attend the workshop of most interest to them personally: Disability Rights with Stephanie Gray from Mobility International USA and Diego Mariscal, Executive Director of 2Gether International; Civil Rights with Frank Smith, founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); and Free Press Rights with Brian Lamb, Founder and former Chief Executive Officer of C-SPAN.

Grassroots Project Development
Students divided into groups to reach consensus on identifying an important issue to address in their home country. Each group then outlined options to address the issue along with potential outcomes and developed a corresponding action plan. Working as a team, students developed realistic and creative ways to market their plans and make them a reality.
February | Anastasiya Ulakina
Turkmenbashy, Turkmenistan | Trussville, AL

Anastasiya, a PAX-placed Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) student from Turkmenistan, has a pro-active attitude. She arrived for her program “ready for changes.” Her favorite motto is “Go only forward and never look back,” which she believes is one of the qualities of a good leader. Within just a few days after arriving in her host community, Anastasiya joined several school clubs and began to seek volunteer activities. Volunteer work is one of her passions and Anastasiya by February had already completed over 79 hours of community service. Some of the most notable volunteer events were the Birmingham United Nations and the Wacky Tacky Lights Show, a fundraiser to support scholarships for science camp. Anastasiya has successfully balanced her academics, school activities, volunteer work and time spent with her host family. She has a 4.0 GPA, is on the track team, and is a member of Beta Club, Recycling Club, and the Service Association.

Anastasiya was one of 26 students selected to participate in the ECA Youth TechCamp; there she developed leadership and training skills in social/digital media. Over the last five months, in preparation for the camp, Anastasiya developed her “Social Change” campaign, which may be viewed on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSv0eDLYRmc. She plans to continue the campaign when she returns to Turkmenistan. Anastasiya also created an IEW presentation video and a video about overcoming exchange program obstacles. You may view the videos at http://youtu.be/8Sm7GPyBuLo and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4AL6tMAtDjQ.

March | Bermet Kasymova
Chelpak, Kyrgyzstan | Fairgrove, MI

Bermet, an ASSE placed Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) student from Kyrgyzstan, is described by her host family and community as resourceful, helpful and courteous. Being placed in a very small town was challenging, but Bermet rose to the occasion. She has taken advantage of a wide range of activities, from refining her creative talent in art class, to shadowing a police officer to learn firsthand about leadership. After finding out that the Akron Veterans’ Home needed supplies, Bermet held a fundraiser. She set up a table and collected donations at school basketball games. Then she arranged with her school’s principal to invite veterans to the final basketball game. Four veterans attended and during halftime, she presented them with homemade cookies and supplies purchased with the donations she collected.

On December 1, when Bermet reached her goal of volunteering 100 hours, she stopped counting and she estimates that by now, she has completed at least 200 community service hours. She continues to volunteer at the local elementary school, assisting in the classroom, and helps out at the local food pantry, nursing home, and library. Bermet loves sharing the culture of Kyrgyzstan. She was interviewed on the local radio station and has given over ten presentations to different groups. She also played her komuz, the Kyrgyz national string instrument, for the Cass City Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year dinner.

Bermet exemplifies the ideals of the FLEX program!
• **Arman Azizyan ’11 (Armenia)** initiated the Armavir Against Bullying Project with funding from the FLEX Alumni Grants program. Arman worked with school teachers and students to reduce bullying and violence and established new initiatives to promote dialogue and peace among youth in Armavir schools (pictured below).

• **Dilafruz Sharifbaeva ’11 (Tajikistan)** renovated the gymnasium at a school for visually impaired students for Global Youth Service Day. Fourteen FLEX alumni and U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan Susan M. Elliot volunteered at the event, which was funded by the FLEX Alumni GYSD grant program as well as over $1,000 in crowdfunding from local community members.

• **Zhibek Karamanova ’03 (Kazakhstan)** successful lawyer, singer, and CEO and founder of the Dining Smart company, held a forum on nutrition and health for nearly 1,000 invited guests with the support of a U.S. Embassy grant. This forum was created to serve as a unique discussion platform for scientists, doctors, cooks, restaurant owners, nutritionists, farmers, and citizens interested in learning more about healthy nutrition and lifestyles.

• **Sergi Kapanadze ’97 (Georgia)** was nominated by the Swiss President to serve on the Panel of Eminent Persons tasked with developing recommendations on how to improve European security. Sergi will be a member of this 15-person strong group, chaired by Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger.

• **Bermet Tursunkulova ’94 (Kyrgyzstan)** was appointed Deputy Minister of Education for Higher Education of the Kyrgyz Republic.

• **Jennet Gurbanmammedova ’10, Turkmenistan** will travel to Washington DC in summer 2015 to participate in a 4-month internship as a graduate under the U.S.-Central Asia Education Foundation program, which provides undergraduate business education scholarships.

• **Valeria Svart-Gröger ’07, Moldova** is finishing a Master’s degree in Germany and serves as president of an ecological organization, EcoVisio, in her native Moldova.

• **Roman Vydro ’10, Ukraine** and his teammates in the physics department at Kharkiv National University in Ukraine won the 7th International Student Tournament of Physics at Warsaw University in Poland in April.
A group of students pose at the American Councils headquarters during the Civic Education Workshop

Gayane Ghazaryan (left; Armenia/Texas) with her host mom and host sister helping out at the Houston Food Bank

Kunduz Efronova (left; Kyrgyzstan/Wisconsin) with her host sister and another exchange student helped a farmer harvest pumpkins

Menli Nepesova (Turkmenistan/Illinois) presenting about her country during International Education Week

Dilovar Habibov (second from right; Tajikistan/Ohio) meets with the Ambassador to Tajikistan

Genadi Shamugia (right; Georgia/Texas) makes a presentation about his country during International Education Week

Students at the MIUSA orientation
A group of FLEX students show their program love during their pre-departure orientation.

Dana Kasymbayeva (middle; Kazakhstan/California) volunteering at a senior’s home.

A group of students walk hand-in-hand as they explore the sights around Washington, DC during the Civic Education Workshop.

Alina Okhrimenko (third from right; Ukraine/California) with her classmates during homecoming week.

Aleksandr Ibragimov (right; Russia/Maine) competes in a fencing tournament where he received two silver medals.

Madalina Postolachi (right, Moldova/Maine) and her host family take a picture to commemorate Moldova’s Independence Day.
Whether or not you are traveling to Washington on June 3 to participate in the June 4 FLEX reception, we ask all interested students, host families and placement organization staff to share with us pictures and brief descriptions of the family, school, and community service moments that made the biggest impression during this exchange year. These will be displayed at the reception to illustrate the program’s success and importance.

Submissions titled “My exchange year” can be sent to: flexprogram.submittable.com