

Ji Yeon Kim

Graduation Year: Junior

College: Arts & Letters

Major(s): Economics, Political Science

Minors(s): N/A

Scholar Group Membership: n/a

Did you received other funding for this project?: n/a

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance? If I hadn't received a grant from CUSE, I wouldn't have been able to afford the ticket. Aside from the possibility of completing my project, I wouldn't even have dreamed of the possibility of conducting my own research if I hadn't heard about an organization that provides undergraduates funding to do your own research.

Project Title: How does citizenship allow for universal preschool?

Project Location: Helsinki, Finland

ND Faculty Mentor: Dr. Stuart Greene

Project Type: Research

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Research/experience necessary for senior thesis or capstone project, Internationalize your Notre Dame experience

Did your funded experience help you:

[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]: Very Much

[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]: Yes

[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]: Very Much

[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]: Very Much

[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:Very Much

Tell us about your experience.

I applied for a grant to go to Helsinki, Finland with the intention of learning about conditions under which equitable preschool conditions were able to flourish. Currently in the United States, our education system is very divided. State and local jurisdictions dictate the curricula and standards, meaning students receive different education and benefits depending on where they live. To me, this was a problem that entrenched low-income, minority children in poverty with few opportunities for economic advancement. Childhood is the most important stage for personality development. That usually only middle-to-upper class children were able to access day care and/or preschool education before entering grade school presented a stark, dividing problem for me. When I read about Finland's comprehensive preschool and daycare program, I was fascinated. Fascinated as to how a country was able to implement a policy that obviously required a lot of funding. After taking several classes at Notre Dame on human rights foundations and statecraft, I was curious as to whether the type of the citizenship enabled Finland to employ extreme measures to ensure equal educational opportunities. I scheduled

interviews with the administrators of at least one preschool in all 7 of Helsinki's districts, and with at least one type of preschool (regular, 24/7, private). I was surprised that there were 7 free, public preschools in the city of Helsinki that were open for 24/7. I was blown away when all preschools provided 3 meals and 3 snacks to every child. I was amazed when every preschool, regardless of its location, had the same quality of teachers, supplies, and interior facilities. My interviews with the administrators showed a very interesting relationship between citizenship and universal preschool. There was trust in the Finnish government, a strong value on work ethic, and a deep desire for the upholding of a "common good". To the Finnish people, being a Finnish citizen meant that your community enabled you to become your best, true self, which allowed for the society to be at its best. Preschools were one of the main foundations for this. And they strive to accomplish this by expounding on what it meant to be a child: a curious, innocent, and independent person that should be allowed to be a child.

Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.

I left Helsinki amazed and inspired. Amazed because I hadn't expected to learn so much from a week of interviews, and inspired because I had a better understanding of what it would take to provide quality education equally to every child in America. It made me realize more fully the problems in our education system today, and in the rhetoric we use to discuss education policy. To see a country where every person and every governmental agency and corporate organization banded together to provide the best potential future for every child instilled in me a sense of purpose and passion--a drive to determine how Finland's methodology could be translated, and not placed directly, in America.

Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.

I've wanted to pursue a career in education policy since the beginning of my college career. Next semester, I will be interning with either the Department of Education's Office of the Secretary or the White House's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. Regardless of which internship I opt for, I will be working extensively with educational policy, programs, and administration. I know I will be able to take what I learned in Helsinki to the various tasks and responsibilities I will be assigned at my internship.

I will also be using this research for my senior thesis. I want to analyze how a definition of citizenship enables more equitable educational policies. I will be doing very similar research when I am in D.C. next semester. D.C. is one of the few cities in the United States that has an universal preschool program. I will be using Finland as a shadow-case study. I hope to be able to conduct similar research in other countries with universal preschool (i.e. Czech Republic, Switzerland, France).

What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?

Don't expect to only learn what you originally set out to discover. Be open to the possibilities of coming across insight irrelevant to your original research proposal.