

Just before the world as we knew it unhinged, I visited America for the first time. I got to see a glimpse of the U.S. before Trump, but much more than that: I dived into the bubble of Harvard Law School that thousands of applicants fight to get in.

Beyond Service Mentality

Obviously, some things were different at Harvard Law. The degree of professionalism was stunning and the infrastructure to support us ranging from library resources, countless service offices and the custodial staff was simply breathtaking. But did I expect anything else? All of this and what comes with it – the service mentality – I might very well have anticipated. So, what did matter? Discovering myself in a whole new set of people from all over the world – all anxious to learn and eager to ask questions, all willing to work hard and party hard, too. I experienced those moments of deep joy and mental satisfaction: when the imaginary matched reality and I saw myself sitting in a classroom listening to truly thought provoking and daring these professors shared because nothing held them back. Just this time it wasn't me watching *Legally Blonde*, it was me sitting in the room where they actually shot it. Likewise, I cherished every conversation that was made special because people came here open minded.

Excellence

Excellence takes many forms. And you will only quite see it when you get there. This is why I struggle to adequately describe an experience that depended on so many: my fellow LL.M.s were marvelous, so were the American JDs and everyone making my LL.M. year run as smoothly as it did. Teaching styles are different of course and there are times when you need to triage your readings because there are simply so many. I came to appreciate what I can only assume is one of the reasons many scholars leave Germany for the U.S.: the freedom to combine ideas in non-obvious ways and walk new paths. Of course critical thinking ranks highly in German legal scholarship as well, but it is still quite tied to conventional paths. We have to walk a long way before we come to dance. It would be misleading to insinuate that U.S. legal scholars fly before they can walk. But I experienced legal expertise, namely what is commonly appreciated and acclaimed, to be much more innovative, creative, funky. Scholars have fun and share their ideas with a wider scholarly and even the general public.

A Sense of Community

After I had been to the UK as an undergrad, I already had a hunch that some things would strike me (or everyone around me?) a little odd once I lived on U.S. grounds. And indeed, I came to learn nuances of US style communication, national idiosyncrasies and the social expectations coming with them. Educational privilege and the endowment effect no doubt have the power to create a sense of exclusivity, but the Harvard community is based on more than exclusivity. Learning, listening and change are not only a highly acclaimed principles from shiny brochures. No, I saw them happen. Confronted with the origins of its own crest, the school was measured against the principles and rules it stands for – and did not fall down. Rather, giving way to change, it will introduce a new Law School shield and more importantly set the stage for the first steps of ameliorating structural discrimination.

Do I Have an Attitude?

After all, I ask myself: How much of this year's uniqueness is tightly knotted to the Cambridge campus? What am I left with after a very exciting year? I have decided to hold on to the sense of departure and curiosity wherever I can – with whomever I can – whenever I can. Harvard enabled me and my fellow students to be our most critical, challenging, and engaging selves. This mentality ties to no place, just as it is not bound to language, skin color, gender or sexual orientation. It is an attitude sparked off in Cambridge, Massachusetts,

but one that I will continuously cherish and practice amongst whomever happens to surround me now.

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“Diving into the bubble”

“Harvard Law School and its funky expertise”

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