Hello New York City!



My name is Simon McNair and I am from Asheville, NC. I am a senior in the Caldwell Class of 2026 studying biological and agricultural engineering. I am passionate about sustainability and hope to pursue a career in ecosystem restoration.

With the multitude of opportunities offered with ELG funding, Caldwell city trips had not been on the top of my list until the New York City trip was announced. I had never been to NYC before, and became excited at the prospect of visiting one of the most famous cities in the world. Coming off of a summer internship in my hometown, I was ready to have an adventure and reconnect with my fellow fellows. Upon arriving at our hotel, we had about an hour and a half before we needed to be at the Caldwell alumni connection event. A few of us decided to squeeze in a trip to the library, which would be closed for the rest of the weekend. This was a great way to jump into the trip: navigating the city under a time crunch, seeing beautiful architecture and artwork at the library, and getting lost in grand central station trying to shave off some time on the way back to the hotel. After arriving (almost) on time, we had the opportunity to meet some Caldwell alumni living in New York. As someone who normally despises networking, it was a great experience getting to talk to some of the alumni and hear the different ways they ended up in New York. None of them were originally from New York, and they all found their way to the city in different ways and for vastly different reasons. Talking with some of the alumni over dinner, we were able to get some local insights. The Met came highly recommended by all, causing me to shift my Sunday itinerary in order to incorporate a visit into my plans.

The Immigrant Experience

The next morning, we woke up and as a group visited the Tenement Museum. If planning the trip myself, I would have almost certainly overlooked this museum amongst the extensive list of museums and attractions the city has to offer. However, I am so glad that we took the time to visit, as the museum offered an organized, engaging look at the history of two families that lived

in the tenements that have since been restored and converted into the museum. Hearing about specific people, what led them to New York, and a view of their daily life was such an effective way to convey the themes of the immigrant experience in the city. Following the museum, we hopped on the ferry to Ellis Island, with a brief stop near the Statue of Liberty. My grandfather's parents had immigrated through Ellis Island, and I was curious to expand on my basic knowledge of the process that they went through upon arriving in the United States. Walking through the exhibit, I was able to gain a much better understanding of what it must have felt like to be someone going through the inspection and processing upon arriving on the island. While we had a somewhat quick visit on the island, I learned a lot and left with much to think about, comparing the historical immigrant experience to what we have today. Later that evening, our group had the privilege of seeing the Buena Vista Social Club on Broadway. This musical contained some of the most impressive feats of human abilities I have seen in my entire life. The singing was incredible, the music was unbelievable, and I was completely captivated by the storyline from start to finish. Having taken a trip to Cuba in high school that was highly oriented towards interacting with locals and experiencing the culture, I was looking forward to hearing Cuban music and learning more about Cuba's history and culture. I knew it would be an incredible show, but I was completely blown away by the caliber of the performance. This musical was also a great example of the lives people may be leaving behind when they decide to immigrate to New York, as seen from one of the musical's characters, Haydee.



A Day to Explore

For our last day, we were given the freedom to roam the city and do as we pleased. I really appreciated this aspect of the trip, as group travel sometimes leads to frustrations when the entire group does not agree on activities. During the day I was able to visit the Natural History Museum, the Met, go up the Empire State Building, and see another Broadway show. Packing on the last day with all the activities I was most interested in was a great way for me to leave the city feeling satisfied with all that I



was able to do. In one day, I was able to see a wide variety of amazing historical artifacts, pieces of art, and a spectacular view of the city. In my time in college I have been able to go on some incredible trips, but this visit to New York is one of my favorites by far.