The Poland Study Tour from John Felice Rome Center (JFRC) is an incredibly educational and enriching experience. Mr. John Kurowski, an American lawyer who studied at Loyola’s Rome Center in 1973, inspired and funded the human rights symposium at the Nicolaus Copernicus School of Law and Administration in Toruń. The 13th edition of the symposium focused on the topic of “The Injustice of Gender: Women’s Rights in a Just Society.”

Before the symposium in Toruń, the students participating in the JFRC Poland Study Tour spent the first few days of fall break in Warsaw, the capital of Poland. We went on sightseeing trips of the city visiting important sites such as the Polish Parliament (Sejm), the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 Museum, the remnants of the Warsaw Ghetto and a powerful monument commemorating the suffering of Jews in WWII which stand in from of the spectacular Polin Museum. We enjoyed the famous and beautiful Łazienki Park with it’s Chopin monument and the Royal Castle in the Old Town of Warsaw.

From Warsaw we took a train to Toruń, a medieval city on the Vistula River with beautiful architecture and 30,000 students. The symposium was a two-day event where students from the Italy Center of Spring Hill University and the Nicolaus Copernicus School of Law and Administration join the JFRC students in listening to the engaging presentations and discussions among intellectuals. There were speakers from various backgrounds and specialities who presented on the topic of women experiencing injustice in society. After the presentations, there was a panel discussion of the speakers during which the students had a chance to ask questions and to voice their opinions about the injustice of women in today’s society as well.
During their stay in Toruń, the JFRC students visited The Living Museum of Gingerbread, where we learned about the history and tradition of baking gingerbread in Poland. The JFRC students even had the opportunity to create their own gingerbreads and bring them home.

For the last few days, we traveled to Krakow, the beautiful medieval and renaissance capital of Poland. There was a day devoted to visiting Auschwitz, the largest German Nazi concentration and extermination camps. We were able to walk through both Auschwitz and Birkenau. It was an emotional and saddening experience, but it reminded the students how essential human rights are in today’s world.

Another day we visiting the Wieliczka Salt Mine, one of the world’s oldest operating salt mines registered on the UNESCO list. Students adventured into 20 chambers and experienced the beauty of sculptures created from the salt in the mine.

Overall, the JFRC Poland Study Tour is a wonderful opportunity for students to visit a beautiful country in the center of Europe and to learn more about the importance of human rights in any society today. A historic context of various events in Poland, the topics offered by the symposia, and the visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau and other places of tragedy in the 20th century make the necessity to observe and defend human rights everywhere real.

Additionally, we were able to try the delicious Polish dishes and traditional Polish entertainment. The study tour to Poland is a truly wonderful way to spend fall break, so please think about this if you study abroad at JFRC during the fall semester!